THE VICTORIAN SUNSET

BOOKS BY

E. WINGFIELD-STRATFORD

THE VICTORIAN TRAGEDY

THE HISTORY OF BRITISH CIVILIZATION

THEY THAT TAKE THE SWORD

ETC.



THE VICTORIAN SUNSET

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PREFACE

In *The Victorian Tragedy*, the first volume in this series, I tried to describe the four mid decades of the nineteenth century. In this, I carry on the story to the end of the century and the passing of its most conspicuous figure.

The immense length of the Queen's reign renders the word "Victorian" a little misleading. It would be more convenient if we could speak of the Victorian Age as ending somewhere about 1870, and adopt some new designation—perhaps *fin de siècle*—for the remaining years. Elizabethan is not more different from Victorian than the atmosphere of the Great Exhibition from that of the Diamond Jubilee.

The Victorian Age, in this narrower sense, is a time of unprecedented material progress and a God's plenty of creative genius. But the Victorians were engaged in building up a magnificent superstructure upon the flimsiest of foundations. They aimed at no mental and spiritual revolution corresponding to that brought about in their environment by the use of machinery. Even their discovery of evolution conveyed no warning to them about the fate of every species in the past that has failed to adapt itself to changed conditions. They pinned their faith to change, or, as they called it, progress, and left adaptation for chance or Providence to provide.

By the end of the century, the foundations of Victorianism, such as they were, had quite crumbled away. The building stood, more outwardly magnificent than ever, upon the sand, until the coming of the first tempest. How clouds, already visible, rose

to blacken the whole sky, until, with catastrophic suddenness, came the floods and the whirlwind, it will be for a third volume, *The Victorian Aftermath*, to relate.

May I be permitted to add one thing ? It is no part of my design, or of any historian's province, to counsel pessimism. To those who believe in free will as a working principle, the word "inevitable" does not exist. The future is what we chose to make it. But without understanding of the past, and above all, of the immediate past, we are working in the dark and at random. We are like men who have wandered from the path by night into a wilderness beset with perils. It is for history to show us where we are, and how we have got there. It is for us, in that light, to work out our salvation.

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BOOK I

ENGLAND IN 1870

CHAPTER I

THE EUROPEAN SETTING

LOOKING through an album of old—but not so very old—press cuttings, my attention was caught by the following stanza, from a probably Evangelical magazine called the *Prophetic Times*:

Clouds of darkness gathering o'er us
  Awful tidings with them bear,
Scenes of misery spread before us,
  Death and pestilence and war,
All in one loud, piercing chorus
  Warn us that *the end is near*.

If this had appeared at any date subsequent to July 1914, one would have thought no more about it. But who would have imagined that language of this kind was capable of being used by even the most Protestant of Jeremiahs, at the beginning of the eighteen-seventies? If there was ever a time when Englishmen had ground for a robust optimism, it was surely then. And robustly optimistic most of them accordingly were.

I do not suppose that the "end" whose proximity our prophet divined was what we should now call the crash of civilization. It was much more probably that still popular bugbear, "the End of the World", whose advent was as imminent to those versed in such matters as at any time during the past eighteen centuries. But somewhere in the world

events must have been taking place that appeared, to at least one simple soul, strange and ominous enough to form the fitting prelude to that tremendous *finale*.

And indeed things were happening whose full significance was little likely to be appreciated in the quiet country vicarage from which the author of these lines probably hailed. Clouds of darkness lay low along the Southern horizon, and though gathering, had not yet begun to darken the serene English skies. The ordinary Englishman was merely conscious that a war, the last of a series, and one in which he had no particular concern, was running its swift and sensational course. That this war marked the close of an epoch, one of vague and hopeful idealism, and heralded the dawn of another, an iron age of disillusionment and realism, few indeed can have suspected. That it could have brought "the end" appreciably nearer was left for one obscure, and probably foolish, rhymster to tell. Except in very pious circles, it was taken for granted that the state of civilization was getting progressively better and better. When the sun began to cool off, in a few odd million years, it would be time to think about an end.

There certainly seemed to be little enough, in the alarums and excursions South of the Channel, calculated to disturb John Bull's complacency. He had not much more than a sporting interest in the quarrel between Gaul and Teuton, so long, at any rate, as they consented to fight it out on their own territory, and keep their hands off his ancient *protégé* Belgium. It was rather a shock when *The Times* published the draft of a treaty which the French Ambassador had been innocent enough to write down at the suggestion of the Prussian Chancellor, von Bismarck, and which that wily diplomat had taken good care to preserve, whereby the price of German unity was to be the French annexation of

Belgium. But England acted with entire dignity and correctness in making it clear that Belgian neutrality must be respected by both combatants impartially.

Opinions and sympathies were divided. The pricking of Napoleon III's bubble empire was not an event likely to excite any too lively regrets. In spite of the fact that he had made friendship for England the corner-stone of his policy, the plotter and dreamer of Soho had never got himself trusted in his capacity of Emperor. Even beneath the crown, he had not ceased to be the seedy adventurer who had gambled himself into a fortune. The next gamble might have taken the form of an invasion. The threat had been thought sufficiently serious to bring thousands of middle-class gentlemen into camp on Wimbledon Common.

And now the last throw had been made, and the gambler rose from the table ruined. That unsubstantial pageant of Empire, the hunts in the royal forests, the fancy-dress balls at which high-born beauties had flaunted their charms with superb defiance of convention, the dalliance, the luxury, had proved to be such stuff as adventurers' dreams are made on—and the dreamer was awake. The Caesar who was too kindly to endure the sight of a battlefield had gone forth for the last time at the head of his legions. The last victory had been staged. The Imperial army, horse, foot and artillery, had descended, in all the panoply of war, upon the town of Saarbrück. The Emperor, on a magnificent charger, his cheeks rouged to hide the pallor of mortal sickness, had ridden beside his boy, the Prince Imperial, into a field of authentic though desultory fire, while the handful of German soldiers in front of them had withdrawn quietly out of harm's way. It was little more than a month later that this same Napoleon had ridden forward alone, in a deliberate attempt to find a hero's death, towards the guns that

were pounding to pieces his trapped army. But destiny had not cast him for that part, so the adventure ended, where it had begun, in England, and as it had begun, with dreams—this time of a fourth Napoleon, the lad baptized in fire at Saarbrück, and fated to a baptism of blood on the point of a Zulu assegai.

There were other dreams that had drifted away on the smoke of the Prussian cannonade. Louis Napoleon had stood—fitfully and imperfectly as an adventurer must—for ideals that had been dear to men of the mid-nineteenth century. He had strutted and fretted before Europe in the part of Liberal Emperor. His Empire had constituted France, in the eyes of Europe, champion of that emotional and mostly middle-class Liberalism that had inspired such different characters as those of Lincoln, Garibaldi, Heine, Gladstone—the range being as wide as that between Mazzini, on the extreme left, and Palmerston, on the equally extreme right. But the Imperial Liberalism had proved but the flimsy and incomplete façade of a structure without foundations, and now façade and building had toppled. It was not only that the Liberal Empire was no more, but that a new spirit had triumphed that had nothing in it of the former romance and idealism.

"Europe", said a British observer, "has lost a mistress, but gained a master." The mighty statesman, to whose piping all the Chancellories of Europe were to dance for the next two decades, was not in vain styled the Iron Chancellor. To the superficial observer this lusty junker of the beetling brows and jutting moustachios was a mere reactionary of a divine right that had hedged German princes and princelets since Louis XIV had set the fashion from Versailles. And no doubt divine right suited Bismarck excellently well, so long as it was embodied in a dear old gentleman who could be played, on all

ordinary occasions, like the joker at cards, though when his wife, or generals, or Protestant conscience, had succeeded in influencing him, he might require a little tactful management. What would happen when the Chancellor came up against a sovereign who not only believed in divine right, but meant to exercise it, the world would see. If he had any mysticism—and there was a streak of it somewhere in his nature—he kept it, with his big dogs and enormous meals, for his private enjoyment. His policy was one of exact and ruthless calculation. Whatever liberties or scruples he had to trample underfoot, it was by blood and iron that he planned and succeeded in placing the crown of united Germany on the unwilling head of his master. It was by consummate finesse that he worked to preserve what the sword had won. For he was the perfect Machiavellian, lion or fox as the situation might demand.

Behind Bismarck was a military machine that not even he could always control. All Europe knew of von Moltke, with his mummy's face, silent in seven languages, who could marshal the whole manhood of Germany and set it irresistibly in motion as if it were all some matter of mechanical calculation. Less was known of an obscure officer of the Napoleonic wars, whose bookish theory von Moltke's success had triumphantly vindicated—von Clausewitz by name, the evangelist of a new gospel destined to capture the civilized world, a gospel not of love but of violence, scientifically applied and unlimited in its application.

Our nameless prophet, if he was premature in asserting that the end was near, might not unplausibly have foreboded its possible beginning in the Franco-German War.

But these things were far from being suspected in peaceful England. The calm surface of national life was unruffled. If sides were taken, it was only as

spectators might back their fancies in the arena. There were one or two hot-heads, notably a certain Frederic Harrison, a propagandist of Auguste Comte's new religion of humanity, who would have had Liberal England fly to the succour of Republican France before Moltke and his machine had crushed the life out of her. But plain Mr. Bull had no ears for such appeals or wish to interfere in his neighbours' quarrels. Let the foreigners fight it out!

A better-known prophet than he of the *Prophetic Times*, Thomas Carlyle, was prolific of reassuring adjectives: "That noble, patient, deep, pious and solid Germany should at length be welded into a Nation and become Queen of the Continent, instead of vapouring, vainglorious, gesticulating, quarrelsome, restless and over-sensitive France," seemed to the hero-worshipper of Frederick the Great, "the hopefullest fact that has occurred in my time". This was no doubt putting it a little strong. France, if she had asked for the trouble that had come to her, by ostensibly picking the quarrel, had at least picked it with a notorious bully—England had not forgotten what measure had been meted to the poor King of Denmark, father of her beautiful Princess of Wales, by that pious old Wilhelm and his Chancellor, and that, too, in the teeth of Lord Palmerston's downright warning that England was not going to stand this sort of thing. In dealing with neighbours so obtuse, John Bull felt that he could take no better advice than that of honest Fluellen, to serve God, and keep out of prawls and prabbles and quarrels and dissensions.

Meanwhile, from a spectator's point of view, the war was good, invested, as it was, with a pomp and military circumstance that had been lamentably absent from that half-civilian brawl of North and South in America. The war-correspondent had at last come to his own and battles were still the spectacular con-

tests of a day. Paterfamilias could enjoy, with his morning coffee, a veritable prose epic. He could see, through such eyes as those of Archibald Forbes, von Bredow's uhlans and cuirassiers jingling on their glorious death-ride, the Prussian infantry mown down like corn beneath the sickle on the slopes opposite Gravelotte, and the venerable Emperor embracing the Crown Prince, Queen Victoria's handsome son-in-law, while the white flag floated over Sedan, and the strains of *Now thank we all our God* rose from the encircling legions.

It was, as Oscar Wilde might have put it, a gentlemanly game. John Bull applauded, shook his head a little when the Prussian jackboot continued to be applied to a prostrate opponent in order to make him disgorge a couple of provinces, rushed provisions into starving Paris immediately on the conclusion of the siege, gave himself a pat on the back, turned to his ledgers and his Liberal reforms, and dismissed the whole affair from his mind. As for the *Prophetic Times*, that was hardly the kind of nourishment that, even in the best-conducted families, would have been prescribed for weekday consumption.

CHAPTER II

THE INFLATION OF OPTIMISM

John Bull had better things to think about than the troubles of his neighbours. The good man was continually slapping his pockets in an ecstasy, by no means speechless, of self-congratulation. Judged in terms of increasing wealth, and the well-being that wealth brings in its train, his record of material progress for the quarter of a century following the Repeal of the Corn Law in 1846, staggers the imagination with its mounting and multiplying statistics. Exports of British goods, whose nominal value had been actually less in 1840 than in the year of Waterloo, had increased nearly fivefold by 1870. It is stated in Porter's *Progress of the Nation* that the fifties and sixties, the first two decades of Free Trade, exhibit an extraordinary expansion and elasticity. Thanks to improved machinery and a lowering of prices, in which other nations did not share, production was rapidly cheapened in all directions; the efficiency of labour increased even more rapidly than wages, and the profits of manufacturers and merchants kept pace with the rapidly improving conditions of labourers and artisans.[1]

It was a record of which a trading and manufacturing nation had every reason to be proud. In so short a space of time no remotely comparable advance had previously been recorded in the annals of any people. Men hardly yet middle-aged must still have had clear memories of that dreadful time, known as the Hungry Forties, when a great part of

[1] 1912 edition, p. 518.

the labouring population had lived in a state of semi-starvation, when the only answer to their prayer for daily bread might have been vouchsafed in the form of a few swedes or potatoes, and Chartists, in unknown but formidable numbers, had conjured up the bogy of revolution.

Now, in 1870, the Chartist was as extinct as the dodo, and if the capitalist was satisfied with things in general, there is no reason for believing that the worker was in any way discontented. Indeed, he might congratulate himself on having got more, in proportion, out of the general improvement than his boss, for while capital, as reckoned by the interest it would fetch, was growing cheaper and cheaper, wages, as reckoned by what they would buy, showed a fairly continuous and very substantial rise. Human contentment is always relative. If the workman of to-day were told to revert to the conditions of fifty years ago, it would no doubt move him to rise and mutiny. But he had only the past and not the future as a basis of comparison, and the past was appreciably worse than the present. Who would want to upset an order of society under whose auspices things had, for a generation past, been getting better and better, and might reasonably in the years to come be expected to get better *still*?

Since Sir Robert Peel had taken his momentous step of repealing the duties upon imported corn, the country had never looked back. British commerce and industry had swept forward from strength to strength, and even unprotected agriculture continued to do remarkably well—the county magnate contrived to maintain his dignity on rising rents, Farmer Giles found himself able to grumble along to the accompaniment of swelling profits, and as for Labourer Hodge, sitting down to his Sunday dinner, his Dad's tales of the Hungry Forties must have seemed as incredible as nightmares. Indeed, by Sir Robert Giffen's estimate,

the average agricultural labourer was consuming, in 1871, more than five times as much food as in 1840. There lingered on a few stern and crusted Protectionists, but their foible had ceased to be taken seriously. The astute Mr. Disraeli, whose political fame had been built on a series of terrific Protectionist philippics against his own party leader, had contrived, now that he had stepped into that leader's shoes, to put Protection unobtrusively on to a shelf from which not even a Tory ministry would show any desire to rescue it.

The leaders of British thought and policy during this period of ever-increasing prosperity, the Brights and Roebucks, the Mills and Gladstones, were inspired less by a spirit of calculation than one of faith. This was none the less ardent from the fact that few of its possessors had the medieval habit of crystallizing faith in dogma. They preserved a decent mystery, even to themselves, about the sources of their mysticism.

They had before them a spectacle, unprecedented in history, of life revolutionized by science. The old gentleman of 1870 looked back to the days when he had been rattled up to town, for a few hectic weeks of Corinthian *sprees* and *rambles*, in one of those marvellous high-speed coaches that had covered the Macadam at ten, twelve, fifteen miles an hour, and had seemed so immeasurably advanced beyond the rambling and lumbering conveyances of the eighteenth century. And now the roads were deserted, save for an occasional tradesman's cart or gig; the villages no longer echoed to the toot of the horn, and the inns had sunk to the status of local pubs. But the landscape had meanwhile been transformed by the new iron roads with their cuttings and viaducts, on which sixty miles an hour was less remarkable than fifteen had been in the most advanced coaching days. The distance between Edinburgh and London had shrunk to a summer day's journey.

No less sensational was the conquest of wind and tide. By 1870, three-quarters of British shipping tonnage was propelled by steam, and the miracle of Elisha, of making iron float, had become so much a matter of ordinary routine, that five-sixths of British construction was of this metal.[1] The sailing ship died hard; the mid-century was the time of beautiful clippers, that raced each other home from China, and finished, on one famous occasion, neck and neck in the Thames, but the cutting of the Suez Canal in 1869 gave the steamer eastward bound, and proceeding by a providentially arranged series of British coaling-stations, a winning advantage. At no time could it have been affirmed so confidently that Britannia ruled the waves. Her twelve-hundred-thousand tons of shipping, in 1870, exceeded by more than a clear million that of her next competitor, the United States.

It was not only by means of railways that the face of the country-side had suffered change. In the districts where coal and iron were most readily available the new towns, or "wens" as Will Cobbett had been rude enough to call them, continued to expand with bewildering rapidity, and to house a steadily increasing proportion of the wage-earning class. In the textile, as in most leading industries, machinery had exterminated the old handicraft, and yet machinery continued to improve and the factories grew bigger, and more airy and brighter, altogether different from the hells of choking vapour and unfenced machinery to which bosses and foremen, strap in hand, had driven food-starved and sleep-starved children in the early days of the Industrial Revolution. These grotesque horrors were now less *en evidence*, thanks to legalized factory inspection and a steadily strengthening trades-unionism, though the condition of many employees in the chain-making or white lead industries, or the small, sweated tailoring establish-

[1] *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Art. "Shipping".

ments in the East End, touched the lowest depths of human misery. But you cannot make Progress without sacrificing a few victims, nor could sensible men expect to reform everything in a moment. The broom that had swept the big spaces would no doubt soon clear up these dark corners. The need was for more and not less progress.

More machines! More inventions! Bigger and busier towns! More and more hands propagated to set the wheels going! The last pound of capital mobilized by the Limited Liability Company, the last shilling by Savings Bank, even the child's copper diverted from the sweet shop to the village Penny Bank! This was Progress. The average British citizen surveyed the world that he was in process of making, and found it very good. There were figures to prove it, and anyone who chose to audit them would find them no less correct than convincing.

A certain difference in appearance between Salford and Florence might no doubt raise questions of taste on which every one was free to enjoy his own opinion, and Matthew Arnold, with irritating irrelevance, might interrupt Mr. Roebuck, Radical Member for Sheffield, who was contributing his quota to the general thanksgiving, by reading out of the newspaper "Wragg is in custody"—Wragg being a poor girl who, having left Nottingham workhouse with her illegitimate child, was believed to have strangled it on the Mapperley Hills—and remarking that by the Ilissus there had been no Wragg. Mr. Roebuck might easily have retorted that neither was there a Hagnon by the Trent—a name at least as uncouth as Wragg to English ears—and that Socrates had been in custody, which was a lot worse than Wragg. This sort of thing led nowhere. But figures and statistics of prosperity were things that could not be gainsaid, and all these unshakable witnesses announced—as the seer of the *Prophetic Times* would

have put it—"in one loud, piercing chorus", that modern Progress had succeeded and was succeeding in making all things better and better, especially for John Bull and his workshop of the world.

What then do we mean when we repeat that these frock-coated optimists were in a deeper sense men of faith than of calculation? This—that they justified Progress by figures and imagined that it could be so justified, because they had first accepted it in their hearts. It never occurred to them that the results of science and invention could be anything but beneficent, or that the trend of modern civilization could be in any but an upward direction. The faster the world kept moving, the nearer it would get to perfection. The possibility that all things might be working together, not for Utopia but for a crash, would have seemed too fantastic to be so much as thought of.

A person with a reasonable amount of property or in secure employment must have felt—apart from his purely private or family affairs—little enough cause for disturbed slumbers. Of course, if he happened to be of a speculative turn of mind, and liked to go in for a high rate of interest, he must take his risks like a man. The course, even of expanding commerce, did not always run smooth. At fairly regular intervals, over-confidence would be followed by a smash, as in that disastrous affair of Overend and Gurney's Bank in '66, and then, instead of 6 or 7 or 10 per cent, income and capital would vanish together. Somehow the business men did not seem to have that perfect control over their machine of credit that might have been expected of such hard-headed individuals. They would allow it to race until the bearings were red-hot and an explosion or breakdown threw it out of gear, and then, after a great deal of loss and damage, things would be got going again, and the whole process would recom-

mence. But even at the worst, the investor's lot was far less unhappy than it had been before the new Limited Liability principle had been put into practice. He at least only stood to lose his own stake in the venture, and, when the company smashed, did not find himself, jointly with his fellow shareholders, liable for the whole of its debts.

But these troubles were only for the bold. The old lady and the retired tradesman, with their savings in gilt-edged, had no cause to quake or quiver. Such tragedies as that of Miss Matty, in *Cranford*, who lost her little all by the failure of a local bank, were of much rarer occurrence. There was no need to bank locally, and the great London banks, with their local branches extending all over the country, provided a security as great, for all practical purposes, as that of Threadneedle Street. The only fly in the ointment consisted in the fact that perfect safety went along with low rates of interest. So much capital was competing for employment that supply tended to outrun demand. But this, after all, was the surest sign of an abounding prosperity.

"Safe as the Bank" was the proverbial yoke-fellow of "True as the Gospel"—though there were professors, at godless Tübingen, who dared aver that the Gospel was not so true after all. But so far no one, out of Bedlam, had ever hinted at scepticism about the safety of the Bank. Nor did anybody dream of doubting that in spite of booms and panics, fluctuations and depressions, the great body of savings would be safe, and dividends would continue to materialize, at stated intervals, like the manna from Heaven.

The most nervous property-holder could indeed say of the social order, "I feel the bottom, and it is good." How, indeed, could there by any human possibility be a collapse? Was it by war? France, the only conceivable opponent capable of threatening vital

injury, had been knocked out of the running for a good many years to come. As for the Germans, they were kinsmen and traditional allies, and as they had no navy to speak of, their victorious legions might as well have been in Mars. A saying of Moltke's was soon to pass into currency to the effect that even though, by a surprise raid, he might land 50,000 men in England, he had not the least notion of how he should get them out again. Britannia ruled the waves; never, during the centuries that her shores had been inviolate, had they been so perfectly secure. There was Russia, of course, but one knew what a war with Russia was like, and it was a venture to which the principle of limited liability was known to apply. The spectacle of Cossacks in Piccadilly was not sufficiently imaginable even for a nightmare.

The prospect of a revolution was even more fantastic. Never had there been less apparent discontent. In the cartoons of the time, the workman appears as a respectable and bearded figure, surmounted by a queer little paper box of a cap, and usually rebuking some agitator. Now that he was admitted into the partnership of the franchise, what had the fellow got to grumble at? What, indeed, could he want more than he had got? Few people in England had heard of a formidable old gentleman, with the appearance of a Hebrew prophet, who had written an enormous treatise, in German, inciting to a class war of world-wide extermination. That the vote should be used by one class to expropriate another was as fantastic as the idea of Cossacks in Piccadilly. What was it but a means of giving a majority of citizens the choice between being governed by Mr. Disraeli or Mr. Gladstone? The workman had planked for Gladstone—and what frock-coated city man could have done more?

CHAPTER III

ROYALTY

In the early part of the century, it would have been a very supple courtier who would have fixed upon the English Royal House as likely to outlast the magnificent dynasties of the Continent. Indeed, there had been one time when it had seemed more than probable that the days of English royalty were numbered. After the fourth George and his brother,

> Princes, the dregs of their dull race who flow
> Mud from a muddy spring,

the chances of the country tolerating another sovereign of the same kidney would have been faint indeed. If there is really a divine Providence that intervenes on behalf of its Anointed, it acted in the nick of time when it replaced these disreputable uncles by a young girl, who, if her early diaries are anything to go by, must have combined a strong will with a singularly engaging disposition.

And now that girl had become a stout widow of over fifty, and looking older, who was veiled from her subjects' sight in the cloud of gloom that never lifted over remote Balmoral. It was nine years, now, since her first frantic cry of bereaved grief had echoed through the state apartments of Windsor; that grief was only the more hopeless now from being silent. The situation was strange beyond precedent. From the standpoint of the ordinary citizen, the monarchy had ceased to function. What did he know of the long hours spent by the Queen at her desk, supervising all the intricate business of state-

craft, and making herself a presence to be felt and known by her ministers? A losing fight, perhaps, against the omnipotence of party cabinets, but one maintained, to the end, with unyielding spirit.

The man in the street harboured a not unintelligible grievance against his Sovereign. She was, partly at his expense, drawing a fabulous income, and to this he would have had no objection, if she had only made a fair return by devoting it to the purposes for which it was intended. He wanted to have a court, and all that a court implies in the way of ceremonial and pageantry. It is the business of monarchy to provide its public with the most popular of all shows, and the taxpayer felt that, having paid for his ticket, he might, after nine years' waiting, reasonably expect to see the doors opened. It was not only a question of entertainment. The suspension of court life was a heavy blow to trade—one cartoon of the time depicts a lamentable scene of a court milliner and her assistants in the last depths of unemployed despair.

It was hard, but not altogether unnatural, that the Queen should have been the target for a good deal of criticism, most of it couched in respectful terms, but some of it scurrilous to the point of open disloyalty. The Prince of Wales provided lampoonists with a convenient foil, and he would be represented as giving his mother a most undutiful piece of his mind. It was worse when gossip fastened unashamedly on to the Queen's private life. Now that dear Uncle Leopold of Belgium had followed Albert to the grave, she had no equal in whom she could confide, and it was but human that she should have prized, perhaps extravagantly, the simple loyalty of a retainer, the big gillie, John Brown. The little, lonely woman, with her life never safe from assassination, must have felt the need for a protector such as Brown proved himself to be, when he collared a

youth, who, otherwise unperceived, had got with a pistol to the window of the royal carriage. As in the way with old retainers, Brown's loyalty was seasoned with an engaging candour—he would, when the day was cold, insist on his mistress wearing a shawl—"Ye'll just put it on,"[1] he would say, wrapping it round her. Such a relationship between mistress and servant was not without a certain beauty, but, for the more discontented among her subjects, any stick was good enough to beat an absentee Sovereign. The most improbable absurdities were passed from mouth to mouth, and even got into print. . . . John Brown, lolling at the Queen's side, with his boots upon the mantelpiece, and the Prince of Wales standing in disgusted impotence upon the hearth-rug. The man whom the Queen delighted to honour . . . to what extent being a matter that only the winner in a competition of scandal could determine!

And yet, despite these unsavoury murmurings, the retirement to Balmoral, so far from weakening the Queen's prestige, had the ultimate effect of immensely enhancing it. The woman was on her way to become a goddess, and like so many deities of the ancient world, retired for a season out of human ken. Balmoral was the underworld from which she was destined to arise in full apotheosis, a mother of nations, a symbolic figure raised far above ephemeral controversy or criticism. Up to the time of her husband's death she had had to stand, like any other woman, on her real or supposed merits. She had stood the test surprisingly well, embodying, as she did, just those womanly qualities most prized in an age of romantic respectability. But her popularity had not been unalloyed, and her German husband, in spite of his many sterling qualities, had never found a key to unlock English hearts. It was necessary

[1] *The Hardman Papers*, edited by S. M. Ellis, p. 177.

for the wilful, impetuous Victoria to fade out of memory, in order that the ideal form of the Queen Empress might be free to assume its proper and superhuman lineaments in the mind's eye of her peoples.

Even while the retirement lasted, criticism never came within measurable distance of menacing the stability of the throne. No doubt there were a few scattered Republicans and even Republican clubs. But to the average Englishman, the monarchy symbolized that permanence amidst change which gave him such an enviable feeling of security. Besides, he was chivalrous and sentimental, and the thought of a lonely widow, heartbroken in her bereavement, gave him the same catch in the breath as the rendering of *Home, Sweet Home* on a musical-box.

Moreover, the Royal Family had acquired that faculty of producing the right person at the right moment that has stood them in such good stead during the past century. If the star of Victoria was under eclipse, that of the Prince of Wales was in the ascendent. The upbringing of this young man had caused his parents grave and not unreasonable anxiety; the record of Princes of Wales had not been a happy one, and Victoria must have remembered what sort of a progeny had issued from the virtuous loins of George III. The sequel to another "Prinny" would be a republic. The royal couple knew nothing of repressions and complexes, and went about their task of education with the direct purpose of controlling every moment of their son's life according to a schedule drawn up by the father. Nor, in spite of the ridicule which it is customary to lavish on this scheme, was it by any means fruitless. Though it signally failed to kindle the love of books or to quench that of pleasure, it did at least implant a high sense of duty, reinforced by a capacity for work, that made a world of difference

between Edward VII and such crowned wasters as George IV.

Even in the staid sixties, it was not an unmixed evil that the young Prince's reputation had so little in common with that of his father. Too strait-laced a deportment has never made for the popularity of English princes. There have been no more popular sovereigns than the fifth and eighth Henrys, the fourth Edward, and the second Charles. The Royal Martyr, on the other hand, had been, like the saintly Henry VI, the pattern of monogamous virtue, while George III had only been allowed to acquire popular merit when he had arrived at the stage of being the "good old king". Accordingly, when Disraeli coined the nickname "Prince Hal", it was in no ill-natured spirit. An heir apparent with a spark of wildness in his disposition was just what the nation needed to relieve the gloom of Balmoral.

How far the popular idea of the Prince was founded on fact is a matter of no historical interest. Probably the stories about him that were told on the boulevards, and confided in the seclusion of smoking-rooms, were wildly exaggerated. There is no more valued social *cachet* than intimate and scandalous knowledge about royal personages, and where such knowledge does not exist it must be invented. It is difficult for a royalty to pay the least attention to an attractive woman without it being assumed—often for purposes of bawdry—that she is his mistress. It was only on two occasions that the Prince's name was associated with any public scandal, and on each his character was triumphantly vindicated. A loyal discretion will leave it at that.

But the Prince's place in the popular imagination is a thing that no historian can afford to neglect. He stood, like George IV in his Carlton House days, as the first gentleman in the nation, the arbiter of such fashionable elegances as his age would permit

And his popularity was immensely enhanced by that of his beautiful Danish wife, whose arrival in England had been the excuse for a veritable riot of loyalty, several people having been trampled to death in the course of the festivities. It is curious that the Prince's reputation as a man of pleasure did not detract from that of Sandringham as a model of all that a happy home ought to be.

[illegible] one very important effect, in [illegible] tradition of English royalty. [illegible] of the Hanoverian Guelphs, it had been *de rigueur* that their legitimate unions should be with scions of the other august and prolific Teutonic houses. The domestic atmosphere of the Court was quite as much German as English. To her husband the Queen had been Liebchen and Fraüchen; her daughter Helena was Lenchen. The Queen herself—though she had no love for Bismarck and his Prussian jackboot—was ardently pro-German. The welcome accorded to Princess Alexandra gained something of its extraordinary intensity from a reaction against this undiluted Teutonism in high places.

Alexandra had no cause to love the nation that, only a year after her marriage, had fallen with overwhelming force upon her father's small kingdom and robbed it of two provinces. And perhaps some subconscious resentment of his own father's domination may have already imparted an anti-German bias to the husband's sympathies. Whatever was the cause, the Prince's spiritual home was far to the west of the Rhine. Despite his guttural accent, he was a Parisian in everything but birth. The most critical of cities understood and accepted him. That acceptance, in due time, was to change the course of history.

Even Disraeli can hardly have realized, when he coined the nickname "Prince Hal", in what its real point consisted. For that Prince had developed into

the only English Sovereign to make a conquest of Paris. And Edward VII's conquest was to have more important results than that of Henry V.

Sovereigns in England are symbols of permanence, but the traditional rôle of their heirs is to be associated with such a measure of change as the Blood Royal feels it safe to tolerate. Edward VII was no exception to the rule. He did not, like his great-uncle George, aspire to be associated with any political party—the conjunction of Albert Edward and Gladstone would not be easy to visualize. The Queen was jealously determined to keep the whole political power of the throne in her own hands, and not to trust her son with the least inner knowledge or responsibility. The Prince—loyally, though not without some regret—accepted the situation. The deprivation would have been more severe had the natural bent of his disposition been political. But in politics his interest was that of an amateur; in the social sphere he exercised a mastery that had in it less of birth than of genius.

His temperament eminently fitted him for such a rôle. In the jargon of modern psychology, one would characterize him as an extrovert. We do not think that his most intimate biographer of the future will be able to make much of his inner life. Solitude bored him, and it was hardly ever that he was to be seen with a book in his hand. He was a man of pleasure in the fullest sense, for he required to be perpetually amused and stimulated—the spectre of *ennui* was ever at his elbow. Witty conversation, light opera, the excitements of racing and pigeon-shooting, the thrills of the baccarat table, the society of attractive women, were among the expedients he was perpetually seeking to keep that spectre from gripping him. In the chase of pleasure, Nimrod is not always to be distinguished from Actæon.

But in this very weakness the strength of Albert

Edward was made perfect. To an environment of perpetual stimulus—such as only one in his position could command—he displayed a marvellous power of adaptation. If he read in no other book, he was deeply versed in that of life. Since he could never afford himself leisure for reflection, he was fain to trust to his instincts, and these were sharpened to a point of fine discrimination that is the quintessence of tact. The very fact that he looked only outward and never within, gave him an understanding interest in those with whom he was brought into contact; every new face impressed itself indelibly on his memory, and he developed that feel of his audience that enabled him, like Charles II, to find the exactly appropriate thing to say or do on every occasion. Such a temperament may be superficial—those who find deep statesmanship or mature wisdom in Edward VII are substituting loyalty for evidence—but there comes a point at which even superficiality may have some of the effects of genius.

It was a matter of no small importance that the heir to the throne should have stood in the nation's eye as a man of pleasure. This in itself was a highly significant breach with Victorian tradition. Among the all-powerful Middle Class that ruled the country between the first two Reform Bills, pleasure itself—quite apart from any question of its guilt or innocence—had acquired a bad name. It was not only a form of unproductive activity, but it was notoriously calculated to provoke the wrath of the Lord. Heaven only knew what vials might not be poured upon the heads of original sinners who presumed to dodge Adam's curse by enjoying themselves. For some time past there had been a disposition, in certain quarters, to challenge the shibboleths of respectability. That dreadful young Swinburne—or Swineborn, as Mr. Punch called him—corrupting the morals of youth . . . girls who went to *Traviata* . . .

and now the Prince, with his Marlborough House Set, giving the sanction of a hitherto respectable Royalty to the pursuit of sin, or at any rate, of pleasure, which, as every good Puritan knew, amounted to the same thing.

In 1870 the worst fears of the unco' guid seemed to be justified. The Prince appeared in a divorce case; a jealous husband forced him into the witness-box; his letters to the accused and—as it happened—insane lady were publicly read. They did, indeed, turn out to be such letters as the Prince Consort himself might have addressed to an elderly governess, and Albert Edward left the box amid a general wonder why he had ever had to go there. But it was a well-known principle of Victorian morality that even to be concerned with a scandal is as bad as guilt. For the next few years the hounds of Puritanism were unleashed upon the Prince; his character, and even his fitness to reign, were openly assailed in pamphlets that enjoyed a huge circulation. But Victorian respectability was already undermined. The cult of pleasure was destined to become as fashionable as that of virtue had been in the sixties. Moreover, the Prince, recovering from an almost fatal illness in the winter of 1871–2, occasioned an outburst of loyal enthusiasm that showed how unassailable was his popularity and that of the Throne with the great body of the nation.

Even the Queen had been enticed out of her seclusion for this great act of thanksgiving, and all her sons and unmarried daughters were there. There, too, was the lovely Alexandra, leading by the hand "little Georgie"—the future George V. The whole of London's millions seemed to be lining the streets. All the lavishly decorated way from Buckingham Palace to St. Paul's there was one continuous and deafening roar of cheering, with the bands thundering out *God Save the Queen* and *God Bless the Prince of*

Wales. The Prince, still very weak and a little lame, had tears in his eyes, as, with his mother leaning on his arm, he passed up the Cathedral steps at the head of the procession. Victoria's observant eye, in spite of the emotion of the moment, noted that "the interior fell rather flat after the exterior. It so badly lacks decoration and colour. It was stiflingly hot . . . the service appeared to me too cold and long." And then back by another way, through the same deafening roar, even the trees being full of people, which, the Queen was afraid, must have been very dangerous for some of them. Poor, ruined, dying Napoleon III, who had kindly been allowed to come to the Palace to see what he could of the festivities, must have had some strange reflections on the difference between Cockney and Parisian loyalty.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHARMED CIRCLE

The Marlborough House Set was helping to bring about a change in the structure as well as the spirit of Victorian society. For the Prince of Wales had more liberal notions than his mother concerning the company that it behoved Royalty to keep. His zest for life had the effect of making him a realist, and his pursuit of its good things was not to be checked by stiff German prejudices about rank and invisible barriers. There was no refuge from the hunter, *ennui*, in the society of our old nobility. Life, in those usually over-ornate mansions, had its *tempo*, a ponderous *adagio*, that was not to be quickened by the arrival even of the heir to the throne. One noble Duke even went so far as to put down his foot about the high stakes for which it was proposed to play under his roof.

Albert Edward therefore chose for his intimates those who amused or interested him. He had also, being a realist, a keen business instinct, and fully realized what advantages might accrue from intimacy with those who pulled the wires of international finance. It was the Queen's German way to keep her court rigidly exclusive and aristocratic. But during the retirement to Balmoral, that court was in a state of suspended animation. It was the Prince who gave the tone to fashionable society. And his action in throwing open the doors of Marlborough House to encroaching plutocracy was the first sign of change in the old order of upper-class society.

That order had stood firm beyond expectation.

during the first half of the reign. There were many who had seen in the Reform Bill of 1832 the beginnings of an avalanche destined to sweep away the nobility, the Church, and the Throne. But the House of Lords continued on its placid way; the great political families, Russells, Cavendishes, Stanleys, were as well represented as ever in high office. In what Mrs. Hemans called " the stately homes of England ", the old pomp and dignity suffered little abatement. Liveried and powdered men-servants flourished, despite the gibes of Radical satirists. Such imposing functionaries as Grooms of the Chambers figured among the domestic staffs of the higher nobility. A lord was still very much of a lord, inspite of the fact that his costume partook of the universal dinginess and that his longer journeys were performed in a common train. Even so, he did not always yield without a struggle to the levelling influence of steam. At Berkhamsted station we can still see the specially built apartment, with its private entrance, in which Lord Brownlow elected to await his train, in seclusion from the common herd of passengers.

It is almost incredible, nowadays, that the great Scottish Radical, Thomas Carlyle, could have allowed himself and his ailing wife to be packed, by their hostess, Lady Ashburton, into a second-class carriage, along with the lady's maid and family doctor, on their journey to Scotland, while her Ladyship retired to the secluded luxury of her first-class saloon.

Two incidents may serve to illustrate the persistence of this lordly tradition. In 1873 there was widespread indignation because the Earl of Darnley had ejected from a farm on his Cobham estate the Mayor of the neighbouring town of Gravesend, the alleged cause being that functionary's refusal to make his son resign a commission in the West Kent Yeomanry, of which his Lordship was colonel, and in which it was his pleasure to create a vacancy.

In the following year the Duke of Portland was unfortunate enough to incur a fine of five pounds, for letting loose on the Queen's highway a locomotive engine, without a man to walk at least sixty yards in front of it with a red flag, to warn such of her Majesty's subjects as happened to be deaf of the monster's approach. The money duly changed hands, but not before his Grace's steward and representative in court, a certain Mr. Cripple, had treated the Bench to the following impressive warning:

"Gentlemen, I bow to your decision, but I am sure the Duke will be very much dissatisfied."

It must not be forgotten that even in the mid-seventies, such latter-day feudalism had a sound, economic basis. So long as land continued to pay, its inheritors had little to fear for their dignity.

Both in the country and the West End, the exclusiveness of society was still fairly maintained, though with increasing difficulty. A London season in the crinoline days, though it might strike a modern debutante as the limit in slowness, must have had a charm of its own that has faded beyond recall. "London Society", according to Lady Dorothy Nevill, "was more like a large family than anything else." Its numbers were limited, and within its pale everybody, more or less, knew everybody else. There was consequently far less than nowadays of social pushfulness and competition, and more, probably, of real enjoyment. One did not hurry over one's pleasures. It was a sign of imperfect breeding to arrive at dances at anything like the time they were supposed to begin —too early arrivals might be ushered into an empty ballroom and informed that the family was still at dinner. There were leisurely dinner-parties, at which the art of conversation still flourished, and for the older generation, still more leisurely whist.

The aristocratic standards of mid-Victorian society set much less account by luxury than those of the

plutocracy that has succeeded it. The true aristocrat not infrequently rules his life by Nietzsche's precept, "be hard"—the Duke of Wellington sleeps and dies on his austere camp bedstead, and the Emperor Francis Joseph slaves out his declining years in the ugliest, dingiest, and worst-furnished apartment of magnificent Schönbrunn. It is difficult to associate any idea of comfort with those bleak, stucco-fronted town houses, which are now being pulled down and replaced by luxurious flats as fast as the leases fall in. From the Arctic stone or marble of the entrance hall, where the officiating footman lurked under an enormous canopy of funereal leather, to the second- or third-floor bedrooms, whither perspiring housemaids hauled cans of hot water from the sunless basement by a *via dolorosa* of whitewashed backstairs, these grand houses were abodes of Little Ease and not unfrequently of Little Health, for the drains—brick, under the drawing-room floor—if out of sight, were not always out of smell.

What was called, and censured as, luxury in those days, turns out to be most frequently what we should call display. Extravagantly elaborate dresses in which it must have been hard to sit down and painful to move, magnificent jewels, number and gorgeousness of men-servants, were the chief pomps and vanities for which worldly young women bartered their charms in the marriage market.

The very severity with which even the innocent party to a scandal was visited, was not entirely due to hypocrisy. Mr. E. F. Benson cites the case of Lady Henry Somerset, who, having discovered some infidelity of her husband's, publicly and dramatically left him, and thereby—though there was no doubt of Lord Henry's guilt—incurred social ostracism. She had no doubt vindicated her honour, but she had betrayed her class. She was like a soldier who, on account of some just grievance against his superior,

deserts his post in face of the enemy. At all costs, the dignity of Society must be maintained and an immaculate exterior presented to the world.

But for some time it must have been apparent that in England, least of any country, could social barriers be permanently maintained. England might be described as a country that has gone off the birth standard. There were individual noblemen, but no such thing as a noble caste, rigidly defined by blood or quarterings. Consequently "Society", like an unconvertible pound, might be "pegged" for the moment, but could not be stabilized permanently at a dictated level. Sooner or later, social values must conform to money values.

The fact that money was to so small an extent considered a passport to "Society" during the fifties and sixties was not unconnected with the overflowing incomes that still ensured from the possession of broad acres. A great landowner, unless he chose to dissipate his fortune on the turf, was almost invariably opulent, and had no very obvious inducement to court the advances of the newly rich. It was one of the assumptions of "Society" that money was so plentiful as to be no object to anyone. A lady of fashion would almost as soon have been seen naked as in a bus; even a hansom would have been thought a little degrading.

Aristocratic society is based upon an unwritten compact to maintain a certain standard of manners and conduct within its pale. To this end wealth is merely a means, it is only in a plutocracy that it is regarded as an end in itself. The plutocrat never ceases to be conscious of his monetary assets, because his social value is determined by them, and he therefore seeks to exploit them to the uttermost. But to the man of breeding money is only valuable to the extent that he is enabled to forget its existence. Love of money is quenched by possession, and thus ceases to be a root

of evil. It is by such freedom to live up to its chosen standards of life that an aristocracy justifies its existence.

But it is not enough merely to be true to one's standards. The question arises of how far these particular standards may be worth maintaining. It was Disraeli who coined the phrase, "men of light and leading". What sort of light and leading was it that those within the pale of London Society and "the county set" were giving to the rest of the nation?

Much could be counted to them for righteousness. What Tennyson had characterized as the "grand old name of gentleman" stood for something distinctively English—among the proudest Continental aristocracies there was nothing quite its equivalent. The gentleman was one who lived among his people and shared their interests and amusements. Much of his time, and some of his money, were devoted to free service, whether as magistrate, or high sheriff, or—what was equally prized—by providing and financing sport. He was divided by no caste barriers from other mortals—the word "*canaille*" had no equivalent in adult English—though public schools, and even universities, clung to such epithets of ancient scorn as "chaws", "touts", and "cads", with all the intolerance of youth.

Much more than in the eighteenth century could it have been said of the English gentleman that he was a man without his price. There was never a higher standard of public honesty. The slightest suspicion on his personal honour was enough to wreck a public man's career. Lord Chancellor Westbury, a self-made man and one of the most brilliant lawyers of his time, was forced in 1865 to resign the Seal, for conduct which was certainly not corrupt, and could, at the worst, have been described as somewhat lacking in delicacy. Those to whom the word Marconi

recalls other than wireless associations, will not need to be reminded of the startling increase of Parliamentary tolerance in our own century.

The willingness of a bourgeois, and even a democratic electorate, to be governed by the descendants of those who had ruled the roost in the days of rotten boroughs, was largely based upon the faith that these privileged persons were free from so much as the temptation to put interest before duty. The otherwise inexplicable trust reposed in the bovine, yawning Duke of Devonshire, was due to the belief that so wealthy a nobleman could never be anything but disinterested. It is doubtful whether certain of the Prince's friends, though endowed as liberally with wealth and far more liberally with brains, would have commanded precisely this sort of confidence.

There was much that smacked of the Pharisee in the determination of the upper class to confront the world with a façade of unsullied respectability. But the assumption that a gentleman would sooner die than condescend to crooked, or a lady to impure ways—though it may have been responsible for all sorts of repressions and hypocrisies—did beyond doubt tend to enforce a high standard of conduct. The penalties for any sort of association with any sort of scandal were so terrific, that few were hardy enough to run the risk. Many a marriage that would have been wrecked, in our own day, on the rock of incompatibility, resolved itself into a not unhappy partnership, because both parties realized that there was no tolerable alternative to making good. And a public career was so vulnerable to the least imputation of misconduct, that a gentleman would as soon have thought of feathering his own nest at politics or on the bench, as of cheating at cards. The worst he would do would be to use his influence and patronage in order to obtain public appointments and the cure of

Christian souls for whom he would. But this was corruption that did not happen to be recognized as corrupt. Nor were all forms of mass-corruption, for public, and not for personal ends, on the index of prohibited activities. Not a little of sharp practice was accounted fair in political war.

A high standard of political and personal honour is much, but not all that is comprehended in light and leading. We look to an aristocracy for a standard of manners and culture, and we may fairly ask how far this requirement was fulfilled by the mid-Victorian upper class. As regards manners, the verdict must be on the whole favourable, though not without qualification. Victorian manners, at their best, were marked by what can best be described as a spaciousness of courtesy, that is only the product of a leisured and secure existence. This courtesy was tempered by the stubborn individualism, frequently degenerating into eccentricity, of the national temperament. The urbanity of the English *grand seigneur* differed from that of the cultured Parisian, who did not feel himself under the same necessity of saying or doing anything he pleased.

It is said of one aged peer, one of the last survivals into the eighties from the preceding century, that he once caused some mild sensation among his guests at a dinner party, by rising without warning from his chair at the head of the table, and, raising his glass with a formal bow to his wife, an old lady more gracious than intellectual, proposing, to the embarrassment of the whole company, the following toast:

"May the Lord preserve you—and *wisen* you!"

In masculine intercourse there were occasions when too much French polish would have been considered unmanly. Masters of hounds derived positive kudos from the indulgence of uncontrolled tempers, a privilege not always recognized by foreign members of the field, nurtured in the duelling tradition. Thy

absorption of the English gentry in country life and pursuits could hardly fail to impart a certain bucolic or provincial tinge to their manners.

Even those brilliant men about town, who made an art of talking and were the autocrats of dinner tables—a diminishing class even in 1870—were not exactly what we should now call perfect specimens of urbanity. Of the most famous of them all, Bernal Osborne, it is said that much of his wit was ill-natured, aiming, like that of Whistler, at humiliating or scoring off some victim. Besides, such autocrats had a way, that would hardly be tolerated nowadays, of monopolizing the whole conversation.

In praising Victorian manners, it must not be forgotten that their scope was limited to an extent that is difficult to realize in our more democratic age. The small minority within the pale regarded themselves as superior beings to the vast majority without, and made no effort whatever to conceal it. No doubt the bond between a landowner and his dependants could be one of deep and mutual affection. But then there was always the underlying assumption that the great man's will was, in the last resort, supreme. Under the most free-handed, it was often as much as a tenancy was worth to be suspected of Radical leanings, or to dabble in the new-fangled agricultural trades-unionism. The limits of gentility were far more strictly drawn than nowadays. A doctor, unless he were a very famous specialist, the family lawyer, with his stove-pipe hat and rather rusty frock-coat, though treated with respect, were not likely to be seen at the Hall except alone and on professional business. Half the families whose descendants form the present-day county set, would not have been considered fit to be called upon in 1870.

What surprises one, nowadays, is not so much what we should now consider the arrogance of the upper class, as the tolerance of it by its victims. It is with

mixed feelings that we hear of Carlyle referring to that same Lady Ashburton, who had treated him, at the height of his literary fame, together with his hardly less brilliant wife, in the light of superior servants, as "the greatest lady of rank I ever saw, with the soul of a princess and captainess"—"captainess" is a good word in the mouth of this non-commissioned volunteer in her company. And to come to the class from which Carlyle himself had sprung, we have no evidence that the wage-earners, as a whole, resented the affable condescension implied in such habitual forms of address as "my man", "my good fellow", and "my good woman", or that mutinous feelings were excited among the vast army of domestic servants by the curious fact that a Caroline or a Percy, if they entered service, would have to discard these too genteel names for one of a list which included the royal Jane and William, and the sacred Mary.

CHAPTER V

LEADING WITHOUT LIGHT

So much for manners in the conventional sense. But what of the inward and spiritual manners that "makyth man", the way or style of life which is the subject of the Winchester motto? We know how Matthew Arnold settled the question, to his own satisfaction, by including the whole of the upper class in the designation "Barbarians". Such sweeping generalizations cannot be taken at their face value. The Victorians—and nobody regretted it more than Arnold himself—were a race of stiff-necked individualists, not to be drilled into conformity with any rule. The "Barbarians" included a scientist as great as Rayleigh, a poet as musical as Swinburne. There were Lord Brownlow, the friend of the pre-Raphaelites, Lord Mount Temple, a pioneer of educational reform, and Lord Salisbury who, though capable of crowning the brow of Alfred Austin with laurels fallen from that of Alfred Tennyson, was, as Randolph Churchill put it, "never happy out of his damned laboratory".

All of which goes to prove that it was possible, even in the early years of Victoria's widowhood, to be a man of breeding without being a barbarian. But it would seem to have been no more than barely possible. Nobody could have been less like the average peer than the Cavendish Professor of Experimental Physics, while it would be as absurd to draw conclusions from an ancient Northumbrian family having thrown up a Swinburne as it would be to identify the upper with the criminal

class from the fact of some noble lord having done time.

Disregarding a few exceptional persons, hardly numerous enough to fill the inside of an omnibus, all the evidence goes to show that Matthew Arnold's epithet, "Barbarians", was as fully justified as any such epithet can be, by the complacently unintellectual tone of genteel society at the beginning of the seventies. The fastidious culture of the eighteenth-century intelligentsia, and even the Corinthian elegance of the Regency, had vanished leaving no trace behind. Since the great break with French culture at the Revolution, England had become insular in a sense that would never have held good before, and brains had consequently run to muscle. To the English gentleman, as to the Indian brave, there was no higher bliss imaginable than that of a happy hunting ground. No doubt he had a vague belief that he would some day have the pleasure of sitting for ever, in something like his nightshirt, on a golden form, with a harp between his knees and an *Ancient and Modern* on his lap, and that grace would be given him to enjoy this sort of thing when it came to the point. But that was not precisely his idea of enjoyment above ground.

How many Victorian magnates have faded out of history, because the scene of their triumphs was on the turf, or in the hunting-field, and further their ambitions did not extend! Disinter, if you can, the record of any noble or ducal family, and it is ten to one that you will find its leading representative to have been a famous master of hounds or owner of race-horses, or perhaps even a slaughterer of big game.

"Jerusalem!" exclaims one of the noblemen in Disraeli's *Lothair*, "what on earth could they go to Jerusalem for? There is no sort of sport there. They say, in the Upper Nile, there is good shooting."

We have been taught by Ralph Nevill to think of the Victorians as " gay ", and no doubt the gentleman of the sixties, away from the society of his womenfolk, could have given points to the brightest young person of our own time in rowdiness and dissipation. But his notions of gaiety, even by Nevill's account, displayed little wit and less imagination. Alcoholic stimulus, concubinage with paid women, billiards in public rooms dim with the smoke of cigars, perhaps a little street rowdiness late at night, and above all gambling, a form of speculation that provided many a rich young man with the only practicable means of reducing himself to poverty—these were what constituted gaiety. One cannot help wondering, sometimes, how the Gay Victorians could have stood the monotony of their own bliss.

The Marquis of Hastings, for instance, that fast young man who dropped £140,000 over a single race, who is said to have once driven to Ascot on a hearse—an act of whose symbolic appropriateness he was probably unconscious—and who died ruined in body and estate at the age of twenty-six, might qualify for the title " the gayest of the gay ". So, for that matter, might a Bedlamite, smashing the furniture of his cell in an ecstasy of maniacal exaltation.

There are degrees in gaiety, and even vice loses half its evil by losing all its grossness. What delicate fragrance invests the memory of the Pompadour! The Corinthian ladies of the Tom and Jerry days seem to have exerted themselves, like the Athenian *hetairæ*, to acquire at least the veneer of culture, in order to qualify themselves for something more than a merely physical communion with their patrons. But in Victorian times pleasure, though it had not ceased to be pursued, had ceased to be respectable. The wrath of the Lord clouded even its innocent forms. To a pious nose, some odour of brimstone could be detected even in the fragrance of a cigar,

and it must have been felt, if not expressed, that the proceedings at Cana of Galilee had been—to say the least of it—unfortunate. This killjoy mentality, once peculiar to the bourgeoisie, had spread gradually upwards, and now, as for the greatest houses in the land, they served the Lord. A gentleman, accordingly, imparted some decent grossness to his pleasures. It was not necessary to aggravate sin by making an art of it.

The *betairæ* of this time were accordingly lost women, unmentionable in decent society and known to their clients by the contemptuous designation of Polls. It is not unnatural that poor Poll should usually have played up to the part assigned to her, and adopted a self-defensive brazenness of demeanour. The famous Anonyma, or Skittles, who, driving her own elegant victoria, was almost as well known a figure in the Park as the Iron Duke had been in his day, was a foul-mouthed and drunken termagant without a vestige of self-respect. This is a far cry from Corinthian Kate, from Perdita and Lady Hamilton.

There is little enough to sentimentalize over in this Dundreary gaiety. It was, at best, the animal exuberance of barbarians, and barbarians furtively conscious of violating their own taboos. It was equally divorced from intellect and the graces. They did these things better, because more openly, at the court of Napoleon III. It was better to gaze on the Countess Castiglione's lovely body than to listen to the damns and bloodys of Anonyma. It is not without its significance that the fourth Marquis of Hertford, the connoisseur who purchased the magnificent Wallace collection, should have elected, like his brother Lord Henry Seymour, to pass practically the whole of an Epicurean existence in the congenial atmosphere of Paris.

To be a gay Victorian was, of course, a male

prerogative. To call a woman gay would have been the most unforgivable of insults. There was another life than that of clubs and houses of call, a life over which woman was politely supposed to reign, and of whose refinements she was the guardian. And no doubt the grossness of the smoking-room was successfully banished from the drawing-room. But the Victorian lady had seldom the inclination, or even the will, to go beyond negative refinement to positive culture. There was hardly anything in London Society corresponding to the French *salon*. Every Victorian lady had her accomplishments, but an ability to paint recognizable water-colours was not inconsistent with an abysmal ignorance of art, and a turn for poker work and fancy wood carving by no means implied a *flair* for interior decoration. Since piety had become fashionable, it was thought more important to serve the Lord than to sacrifice to the graces—and the Lord was known to be a jealous god. Parnassus was covered with His notice boards. Nudity was not found pure in His sight, nor passion proper. It was wonderful that under these circumstances the mid-Victorian lady accomplished as much as she did; that dinner parties were sometimes, at least, enlivened by witty conversation, and that men of genius, like Disraeli, were enabled to find solace, if not inspiration, in female companionship.

It was unfortunate that the Royal Family should have been so utterly cut off, as it was after the death of the Prince Consort, from the intellectual and æsthetic life of the time. Victoria, despite the tartan horrors of her Balmoral, was by no means a Philistine, though it was the most obvious and orthodox forms of art that met with her approval, and her eldest daughter, her father's favourite, who was shipped off in her 'teens to Germany, was a highly accomplished woman. Another daughter actually contrived a

statue not inferior in merit to some others of that time. But the Prince of Wales, who might have become a leader of culture as well as fashion, was almost totally devoid of literary and æsthetic sympathies, except in so far as he was capable of being amused by light opera. The doors of Marlborough House, open to financiers, to witty conversationalists, to the leaders of the racing world, and men distinguished in many walks of life, were closed against artists and men of letters.[1] Pigeon shooting was more to His Royal Highness's taste than poetry, and a figure lost much of its attraction for him when transferred to canvas. It was perhaps a subconscious reaction against his father's influence that led to his own being thrown on to the side of the Barbarians.

After all, it is as easy to make bricks without straw, as to create an enlightened upper class without education. And as far as the training of the intellect is concerned, it would hardly be too much to say that the average boy, at one of the more expensive and select public schools, not only lacked any such training, but was drilled into a positive aversion from any sort of intellectual activity. The curriculum was so remote from all the needs and realities of life, that it was rightly regarded by the boy as an irksome and unnecessary grind, to be got through, or preferably shirked, with least possible expenditure of energy. It was, in fact, several centuries out of date, adapted, as it was, to the requirements of the Renaissance, when Greek and Latin formed between them a universal language and when almost everything that was of value either in science or literature had to be studied in one or other of them. At that time the cult of the classics had aroused a high and almost holy enthusiasm; they formed the key to a new realm of light and intellectual beauty; to write

[1] As such—for an exception must be made of Monckton Milnes.

pure Ciceronian instead of the old rough-and-ready monk Latin was the crown of many a famous scholar's ambitions.

At such a school as Eton, the form of this classical training remained, but the soul had long departed from it. Even the masters had ceased to have much heart in the routine, though, as it provided them with a dignified and not too strenuous means of livelihood, they were as a rule ready to fight in the last ditch against any sort of change. To the boy it was a matter of hunting in dictionaries, of derivations, of arbitrary but confusing quantities, of words to be jammed into so-called verses whose connection with poetry he hardly suspected, and so many lines "construe" carved from some book or alleged drama, in which, as book or drama, no one expected him to take the least interest. A bright boy might sharpen his wits and evade the dictionary by the practice of cribbing, but as such activities were supposed to be criminal, they were not pursued in any spirit of disinterested scholarship. And to confirm, if that were necessary, the pupil's hatred for the whole company of the quantitative and grammatical, from Homer to Lucian, the prescribed form of non-corporal punishment consisted in scribbling uncomprehended extracts from their works, measured by fifties or hundreds of lines, on to the paper, to the ruin of handwriting—since no honourable master, having received honest quantity, would raise finicking objections on the score of quality.

It was to this Bedlamite travesty of education that the young squire or peer was subjected during the most formative years of his life. If he had acquired such a culture as an understanding acquaintance with the classics is capable of conferring, that would have been much to the good. In the eighteenth century something of the sort does not infrequently seem to have been achieved—Charles James Fox was as fond

of his Euripides as of his game of cards at Brookes's. But throughout the nineteenth century the familiarity of gentlemen with the classics becomes more and more exceptional; Gladstone and Lord Derby—Disraeli's colleague and the translator of Homer—being among the last representatives of the old tradition, and the survivors from the time when enormous daily portions of verse had to be learnt by heart under pain of stripes, a heroic method that does seem to have been crowned with results. But the days were past when a gentleman would have been as much ashamed to misplace his quantities as to drop his aitches. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a priggish familiarity with such matters would have been decently cloked even if it had existed.

A modern, as distinct from a classical education, was beginning to be offered at some progressive schools, but those with the proudest traditions were generally bulwarks of reaction. At Eton, when, as a great concession, French was first allowed to be taught, it was on the extraordinary condition that it should be treated on the footing of a dead language.

The second quarter of the century was an age of reforming head masters, and much of anarchic brutality was purged away. The principle was adopted, in many schools, of deputing authority to the elder boys; the result of this was to create a sort of dual government, a monitorial oligarchy under the suzerainty of the masters. This suzerainty could seldom be very close or effective owing to the juvenile species of trade-unionism which rendered a boy ready to undergo or tolerate any wrong, rather than violate the taboo upon "sneaking".

The task of training up men of light and leading was in fact twofold. Light should have been generated by a school curriculum, which more often had the effect of extinguishing any wakening sparks

of intellect. Leading was provided for by the real public school education, which emanated from the other boys. It was a Spartan discipline, crushing out individuality, but developing powers of command and self-command to an extent unequalled in any other system of education. It was a discipline, largely, of athletics, including that characteristically Spartan form of athleticism that consists in the endurance of pain. The taboo on sneaking, combined with the mass suggestion of loyalty to the school, enabled the darker aspects of this rule of boys by boys to be successfully concealed. What physical and moral outrage a child might be subjected to by his seniors in the process of hardening, was happily unsuspected by parents. A fellow did not talk about such things on holidays, still less write about them during term time. The barbarian chief, or atheling, may be a magnificent specimen of humanity, fearless, strong, fit to command. But in an age when science and machinery are revolutionizing civilization, qualities of mind and spirit are required beyond the scope of the noblest savage. These qualities were tragically lacking in the class to which a naturally conservative people was accustomed, and on the whole willing, to look for guidance.

CHAPTER VI

PHILISTIA IN DECLINE

The achievement of those four wonderful decades, from 1830 to 1870, is not, to any considerable extent, that of the landed aristocracy. England was, to an extent unparalleled before or since, dominated by her bourgeoisie, and what we generally mean by the Victorian Age is, for good or evil, their age. In their uniform of sombre black they conquered new realms of science and literature; they made England the workshop of the world; they laid deep and truly though without intending it, the foundations of a Commonwealth of Nations.

Matthew Arnold had his epithet for them too. They were Philistines, enemies of the light. That seems strange, in view of the harvest of genius of which the soil of Victorian Philistia was prolific. And yet there was something even in that genius that savours a little of Gath. There was hardly one, even of the greatest Victorians of this epoch, who could not be made to contribute pretty handsomely to a Philistine anthology: Carlyle on Keats—" fricassee of dead dog "; Macaulay as bull in the Nankeen China shop; Herbert Spencer on almost every work of literary or artistic genius he had ever heard of; Dickens bargeing into criticism of Pre-Raphaelite art; Ruskin on Canaletto and Ruysdael and Whistler; Tennyson consoling his hero for the loss of Maud by shipping him frothing and bawling to the Crimea; and last, but not least, Matthew himself, disposing of Shelley's life in an essay and his poetry in a sentence—what Philistines!

Looking into it a little more closely, we begin to suspect that the Philistinism is not a mere blemish on the genius, but, in a sense, part of it. Take away the Philistine element, and you take that rude and abounding energy that is the secret of Victorian achievement. The brood of Goliath does not advance, like Agag, delicately—it strides forward, with spear as thick as a weaver's beam, smashing down indiscriminately everything in front of it. Not an elegant method of fighting, but still—judged by results—uncommonly effective.

When Arnold said "Philistine", what he usually had at the back of his mind was "Puritan", and the Middle Class of the first half of the reign was Puritan and Evangelical to the backbone, not even excepting those of its members who, like Herbert Spencer, had carried Protestantism to its logical conclusion of repudiating every sort of supernatural authority. Middle-class Puritanism was no doubt a hard and unlovely creed, actively hostile to beauty, but it was also a discipline in that sovereign faculty of concentration, failing which no work of enduring beauty ever left its creator's hands.

Nowadays one has a little hesitation in using the term middle-class. It is apt to cause a slight embarrassment, as if you had insinuated that some one was a second-class lady or gentleman. As on the railways, there is now only first and third. One of the great difficulties of organizing the middle class is that nobody is very keen on advertising that he belongs to it. It was quite different in the first half of Victoria's reign. Then the bourgeoisie was proudly—even aggressively—class-conscious. Such men as Cobden and Bright regarded their class as the backbone of the country, and themselves as inheriting the tradition of the great merchant princes, the Fuggers and Welsers. What irritated Arnold about his Philistines was their maddening self-

complacency. They were not ashamed of being middle class; they were ready to tell the world about it. Like Mr. Brownlow and Mr. Pickwick, they were respectable British citizens, and what Duke could flaunt a prouder title?

Now it was just about this time, 1870, that the first signs of change were beginning to be apparent. Five years before, a note of prophetic warning had been sounded. Charles Dickens had opened the last of his completed novels with a description of the newly rich Veneering household. This was something entirely new in Dickens. It was not that the Veneerings were odious, in the sense that Pecksniff had been odious, or Gradgrind, or the unconverted Scrooge. Even in his book, *Our Mutual Friend*, he does not put them in the pillory as he does Mr. Podsnap. He observes them and senses their atmosphere as a startling and rather unpleasant phenomenon. His novels had been one great human comedy of middle-class life in the days of its glory. But when the curtain rises upon the Veneerings, we are watching the prologue to a tragedy. Matthew Arnold, who disliked the bourgeoisie, saw it only in the plenitude of its Philistine strength. Dickens, whose insight was born of love, published in the streets of Askelon the first premonitory news of its decline.

"Mr. and Mrs. Veneering were brand-new people in a brand-new house in a brand-new quarter of London. Everything about the Veneerings was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new, their plate was new, their carriage was new, their harness was new, their horses were new, their pictures were new, they themselves were new."

There had been just such a new establishment in the forties, when Hudson, the railway king, had risen on the crest of a boom whose slump was

destined to engulf him, and most of his shareholders, in ruin. But Hudson was an isolated phenomenon, and Society only knew him by stories of his own and his wife's extravagances. It was otherwise with the Veneerings, who were not only tolerated, but actually courted by needy aristocrats like Lady Tippins, and genteel men about town like Mr. Twemlow.

Though described in a mood of rollicking humour, the Veneerings' dinner-party leaves a more unpleasant impression than almost anything else in Dickens. The gallery of Dickens portraits contained some ugly enough characters, but even Ralph Nickleby and Scrooge had stood four-square to the world with a certain self-respect. They may have wanted money, to enjoy or to hoard, but they did not dream of using it to buy themselves out of their class. Being respectable why should they aspire to be genteel? But this kind of self-respect was just what the Veneerings lacked. They were not only a new, but a sham product, perpetually trying to pass themselves off for something other than they were. But their lack of self-respect was no greater than that of their aristocratic friends, fawning, literally, for food—Lady Tippins's gastronomic exploits are mercilessly set down—upon those they despised.

But in 1865 such pushers as the Veneerings had hardly begun to make any impression, except on the alert intelligence of Dickens. Matthew Arnold's representative Philistine was Mr. Bottles, a self-important and thoroughly self-satisfied bourgeois. But even by the beginning of the seventies, that satisfaction was beginning to wear a little thin. The star of the Philistine was on the wane. Instead of thanking God that he was born in Gath, he began to dream wild dreams of being numbered with the Barbarians.

Several causes were contributing to undermine the old order of middle-class society. The indi-

vidualist employer, ruthlessly pushing his own business in the face of cut-throat competition, was now beginning to yield place to the salaried directorate of a Limited Liability Company. There was not the same pride to be derived from such service as from even the pettiest autocracy.

The very success of British business had its effect on the business man. There was no longer the same desperate struggle for survival as there had been earlier in the century. Those lean and tight-lipped factory owners, with the prospect of the debtors' jail never very remote, had been succeeded by a new type of *entrepreneur*, sleek and a little pompous, with billowing frock-coat and gold Albert watch-chain, the very picture of gilt-edged security. In fact, he was rather too much inclined to take that security for granted, and to allow foreigners to cut in and exploit new processes and methods that had their origin in British brains.

This worthy personage was a good, as well as a prolific father, and was rightly determined that his boys should have the best education that his now well-lined purse could buy—the education, in fact, of a gentleman. Such education as he himself had got, had been picked up in a casual and haphazard sort of way. Speaking offhand, one can remember none of Dickens's vast company of worthy middle-class characters who is known to have hailed from a public school—though Sir Leicester Dedlock must surely have been an Etonian. Dickens himself received his education in the hard school of life. Of the great men of genius who were his contemporaries, it is remarkable how few went through the discipline of a formal school education. Tennyson and Browning were brought home from local schools at the ages of eleven and fourteen respectively; Mill was his father's pupil; Herbert Spencer is described as having been practically self-taught; the best part

of Ruskin's education was that which he picked up travelling with his parents—he had only a brief and unprofitable experience of a day school.

A middle-class education must have been a rough and ready affair, at best, during the first half of the nineteenth century. Schooling was provided by local day or grammar schools, and by such private establishments as that of Mr. Creakle, in *David Copperfield*. Numbers of boys of quite well-off parents were consigned to private schools where they were kept till they were ready to be launched on the world. Many of these schools were scandalously inefficient—one knows of delicate boys who were literally done to death by neglect and privation. On the other hand, it was possible that chance might throw up a head master of real genius—such a one as Johns of Chipperfield, a reverend botanist who managed to inspire his boys with some of his own enthusiasm for the first-hand study of nature. And again many boys were pitchforked, early in their 'teens, into the business of making a living.

But by the middle of the century, the extension and strengthening of the public-school system were beginning to effect a silent revolution in the character of the bourgeoisie. Not only the increased abundance of money, but the development of railways, made it easy to send boys backwards and forwards three times a year to distant establishments where they could be herded together and standardized according to the most approved patterns. New public schools sprang up in response to the growing demand; the old grammar schools were brought up to date; even in the oldest foundations some form of the new monitorial system was introduced. A standardized type of education, in and out of school hours, turned out a standardized type of boy, well-mannered, self-reliant and athletic, not easily to be distinguished from the Etonian or Wykehamist product.

It is one of Mr. Chesterton's paradoxes that the glory of Dickens consisted in his having been unable to describe a gentleman. Sir Leicester Dedlock is proof to the contrary, and so even is Twemlow. But one feels that Dickens was never quite at home in upper-class society, and—what is more—that he would have thought no shame to have joined in the Radical chorus:

> I am no gentleman, not I,
> No! no! no! no!

The gentleman, by the very fact of his conforming to a high standard, must to that extent be standardized. And we may perhaps amend Mr. Chesterton's dictum, by saying that it is the glory, not only of Dickens, but of that grand, early Victorian bourgeoisie of which he was the representative man, that they were too individual to be standardized, even as gentlemen. This may have been responsible for a certain lack of intellectual discipline, even in the best of them, but the soil that nourished the weeds also gave birth to an exuberant harvest of genius.

Now that the Philistine could afford to have his son drilled into the likeness of a Barbarian, it remained to be seen whether that prolific exuberance could survive the process, or whether the advantage of being like-mannered with any average Duke would entail the penalty of being also like-minded. And again, would it be possible to maintain upper-class exclusiveness, not against figures of fun like poor old Hudson, but against a new class of parvenu whose manners gave no clue to his origin?

CHAPTER VII

THE EDUCATION OF THE PROLETARIAT

Brief and brilliant had been the reign of the bourgeoisie, but after 1867 it was something more than probable that, sooner or later, power would go with the vote, and that what Matthew Arnold called the populace would be in a position to determine the nation's destinies.

Except for a few disgruntled die-hards, like Robert Lowe, such a prospect—if ever envisaged at all—had no terrors. There had seldom been a time when the wage-earning class had been less in the limelight than during the fifties and sixties. In the mines, in the factories, in the fields, the workers were devoting the best of their bodily and mental powers to building up the prosperity that was the theme of so many middle-class panegyrics. They were giving of their energy too freely to have much of it available for other employment. Men of creative genius did not rise from among their ranks. But they were, on the whole, contented with the steady improvement of their conditions. Times, if hard, were not so hard as they had been, and were getting better.

It was a period of incubation. In the first wild rush from handicraft to machinery, conditions in the new factory towns had been chaotic. The advantages of mass production were sensationally obvious, but the effects of herding together enormous masses of humanity to serve the machines, and the new social problems thereby created, were hardly appreciated at all. Everything except output was left to chance.

The new towns thoroughly deserved the name of wens. They were hideous, squalid and dreary, their inhabitants, during their brief intervals of exhausted respite from the machines, knew none of the beauties of nature, and few of the amenities of life. Even Sunday was made a day of Lord-fearing gloom by a devout magistracy. It is little wonder that uncouth manners and brutal amusements were rife.

There is, for example, Leech's cartoon of the new clergyman, expressing the hope, to a group of friendly miners, that he may see them on the following Sunday, and receiving the reply:

"Oh, aye, 'e may coom if 'e loike. We fight in the croft, and old Joe Tanner brings the beer."

The wonder is that, in their cheerless environment, the workers did not sink into hopeless savagery. It is however the fact that, in spite of all disadvantages, they clung fast to their heritage of civilization, and not only materially, but morally and intellectually, contributed to progress. Quite early in the Industrial Revolution, it became evident that the constant association with machinery had its distinctive effect on human beings, just as that with horses results in the horsiness of ostlers, grooms, hunt-servants and jockeys. The more skilled the work, the more pronounced its effect. An aristocracy of labour began to emerge. The engineers were early marked apart by their hunger for exact and technical knowledge. Mechanics' Institutes date from the twenties. The factory worker, particularly in the North, was evolving a shrewder, better-educated, though perhaps more dour and ruthless type than his country cousin.

The mere fact that vast multitudes of workers found themselves pitchforked into these new towns, and compelled to shift for themselves under conditions of ruthless competition, had the effect of training them in habits of individual and collective self-help. They were completely severed from the old, semi-feudal

traditions. They never came into contact with a squire, and their relations with their employer had little in them of sentiment. If they respected him at all, it was on account of his greater capacity than themselves for accumulating "brass".

It was early borne in upon them that, as individuals, they were at a hopeless disadvantage in dealing with their bosses and had little chance of support from the genteel politicians at Westminster, who lived in a world apart from them and their needs. So they began to organize in Trades Unions, in Chartist lodges, in co-operatives. They had much to learn, and their failures were for long years more conspicuous than their successes. Strike after strike ended in defeat; Robert Owen's scheme for a universal Trades Union proved unworkable; Chartism declined from the formidable to the ridiculous after the fiasco of the monster petition of 1848. In the fifties and sixties, the ambitions of the workers were limited to the practicable—one might say to the commonplace. Trades Union history records no grandiose combinations, only the patient spadework of individual and local unions. But it was just by this means that the workers were training themselves in the routine and discipline of combination. A man's union was not only a war-time organization for carrying through some life and death struggle for wages, but a perpetual bond between him and his mates. Such another bond was furnished by the co-operative societies, which, from a humble beginning in Toad Lane, at Rochdale, were now becoming the recognized means of enabling the working class consumer to become, collectively, the provider of his own necessities.

All this was developing a team spirit among the town workers, which in due time might ripen into a militant class consciousness. But in the country, where the feudal tradition still persisted, the labourer

was less inclined to take matters into his own hands. Trades unionism, when, in the early seventies, there was an attempt to extend it to agriculture, broke down altogether against the active hostility of the "quality", and the apathy and suspiciousness of the labourers themselves. The habit of looking outside their own class for leadership and support was too deeply ingrained. Gradually there appeared a vertical as well as a horizontal cleavage in the social order. The ever-increasing multitude of those who tended the machines became opposed in ideas and ideals to those who tilled the soil.

Class consciousness, as we understand it to-day, was only in embryo, even in the towns. Karl Marx had not yet become a name to conjure with among the workers, and there was less revolutionary feeling now than there had been during the sixty years between the outbreak of the French Revolution and the collapse of Chartism. That the working class had not only the capacity for feeling in unison, but something to which it would be churlish to deny the name of a soul, was shown at the time of the American Civil War, when the Northern blockade of the cotton ports, by cutting off Lancashire from its raw material, plunged its artisans into terrible misery. But not for a moment did they allow their own interests to bias them in favour of slave-owners. With true Lancashire doggedness, they and their lasses went on short commons, and prayed for the triumph of Lincoln and his armies.

It was no wonder that the great body of the well-to-do should have accepted with misgiving the partnership of the working class in the franchise. But it was plainly inexpedient that a large, or any, proportion of this new governing class should remain uneducated. In the nineteenth century it had become almost inconceivable that any knowledge worth having could be communicated except by means of the

printed word, and hence it had come to be pretty generally assumed that education and literacy were the same thing. It is true that Charlemagne and Akbar had been illiterates, equally true that a mere bowing acquaintance with the three R's is in itself no education at all, but merely a means of opening the mind to all manner of information, true or false, and exposing it naked to suggestion, good, bad, or indifferent.

It was just this sort of literacy that was conferred by Mr. Forster's great Education Act of 1870, the most important achievement of Gladstone's first ministry, but one in which Gladstone himself displayed surprisingly little interest. By this Act, schools were provided for all, though the power of making attendance compulsory was at first left with the local Boards, and payment was exacted from the parents and enforced at some schools by the brutal method of thrashing children who came unprovided with school pence. Compulsory education, free of charge, was finally established in 1891.

But for the training of the mind and character, the only education worthy the name, the new scheme hardly attempted to provide. If the excellent Mr. Forster, connection of the Arnolds though he was, had used the words of Pericles—"we aim at beauty without extravagance and contemplation without unmanliness"[1] he would have seemed to anyone familiar with the working of the new national schools as one that mocked. The only training of the character that anyone deemed practicable was that imparted by the various churches and sects. These bodies, and particularly the Church of England, had been beforehand with the State in the educational field, and it was one of the most difficult of all questions on what terms the already existing schools should be adopted into the general scheme.

[1] Sir R. Pollock's Translation.

It was the deliberate aim of Liberalism to be educationally neutral. Any official attempt to bias the character or to impart any definite philosophy of life was felt to be an infringement of liberty. It was a grievance that any citizen should be compelled to pay a single penny in rates (though the same principle was not held to apply to taxes) towards the teaching of any dogma—even to other people's children—of which he might not approve. English common sense, or muddle-headedness, arrived at an extraordinary compromise, whereby, in the new, State-provided Board Schools, the Hebrew Scriptures were allowed to be taught, provided they were not explained with sufficient clarity to allow the explanation to coincide with anybody's doctrine.

But such smattering of Christianity as could be imparted, even where and when the sectarians had a free hand, did not amount to much more than scratching the surface of the mind. It was one thing to stumble or gabble through parts of the Catechism, or even, if you were exceptionally bright, to be able to answer, in Sunday School, how many bears ate how many children and what lessons this ought to teach us, but it was quite another to turn out men and women capable of so ruling and ordering a machine-fed civilization as to make its gifts a blessing instead of a means of suicide.

It might have been argued that the average public schoolboy did not get so very much more out of his undigested Latin and Greek than the National school child out of his painful climb from first towards sixth standard. But the public schoolboy did get his character educated, after a fashion, out of school hours. There was nothing corresponding to this juvenile discipline available for the young proletarian, when he issued from the classroom into the street which was most often his playground. He was barely literate—and not invariably that. One has

come across men in the war-time army, who, despite full years of schooling, could not stumble through their A B C, nor even spell their own names correctly.

Literacy is no doubt the first thing needful in a modern education, but a just literate crowd is a pipe on whose stops any cunning and interested practitioner is able to play what tunes he will. The task of moulding the mind, from which the State conscientiously turns aside, will be joyfully shouldered by the political boss and the cheap newspaper proprietor.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CRUMBLING OF THE CERTAINTIES

If we had to select a point of time by which we could date the passing of the great Victorian Age, it would be that in which Dickens dropped in a mortal swoon from his place at the dinner-table, on the 6th of June, 1870. It is a pity that some other word cannot be invented to cover the last three decades of the Queen's immensely long reign. When the ordinary man talks of the Victorian Age, what he usually has in mind is the period of bourgeois supremacy, which would be better dated from the accession of Victoria's sailor uncle than that of Victoria herself. By 1870, the stately edifice of Victorian achievement stood practically complete, and if every work of creative genius subsequent to that time were to be blotted out of memory, our estimate of the most eminent Victorians would be substantially what it is to-day.

It was not that any startling break with the old tradition was to be witnessed in 1870 or the decade that succeeded it.. On the contrary, things seemed to go on complacently in the old grooves. Tennyson and Browning, Darwin, Huxley and Spencer, George Eliot and Matthew Arnold, Morris and Swinburne, Millais and Rossetti, continued to dominate the scene, and showed no abatement in vigour. The lack of new men worthy to rank with these giants was conspicuous. So far from the Victorian glory being past, it might have seemed as if Victorianism had stabilized itself for a quite indefinite period. But in things of

the spirit, stability is death. There is a beauty of those still, cloudless days that sometimes usher in November, when the woods are yet in leaf and glorious with tawny and gold, but the leaves are dead and hang by their brittle and sapless stalks waiting for the first onrush of storm from the south-west.

Nothing, indeed, is more wonderful about the greater Victorians than their longevity, not only in years but in working vigour. Unlike the romantic contemporaries of Keats, or the æsthetic revivalists of the nineties, their genius climbed slowly to its zenith, and for a long time its decline was hardly perceptible. There was the Laureate, Tennyson, now a bearded and majestic bard of sixty, and occupying a position in the public eye such as had been attained by no previous English poet during his own lifetime. In verse as flawless as ever, he was bringing to completion his most ambitious venture, that of reviving Britain's legendary past as Virgil had revived that of Rome. He was about to launch out into drama, of a kind more literary than dramatic; one or two of his greatest short, narrative poems were yet to come. But except, perhaps, for *Rizpah* and *Crossing the Bar*, we should have a reasonably complete Tennyson, had the Laureate died on the same day as Dickens. Perhaps his reputation would even stand higher, if some of the merely flawless work of his later years—and some work not flawless at all, but flat and bathetic, like the lamentable Jubilee Ode—had been denied us.

There was Browning, with his master work of *The Ring and the Book* accomplished, continuing his experiments in psychological dissection with a subtle ingenuity that, as time went on and the difficulties of interpretation increased, became more and more a matter of blind faith to the ordinary reader. There was Swinburne, whom the least stimulus would incite to endless variations on the musical themes of *Atalanta*

and *Poems and Ballads*, sound which, like that of running water, exercised a hypnotic effect, so that one could be held spellbound without ever asking what—if anything—the words might mean. There was George Eliot, no longer content with the direct and intuitive vision of her early novels, but interminably set on conquering, by scientific rule and line, the mysteries of the soul. There was Matthew Arnold, forsaking the chair for the pulpit, a mournful evangelist who had somehow contrived to mislay his gospel. There was Ruskin, now entering on his career as a professor, a capricious and eloquent oracle, more and more recklessly dogmatic as his mind hardened with oncoming old age.

These Victorian giants gained in impressiveness with every passing year. Their output continued undiminished. But they had almost ceased to create. As compared with previous decades, the seventies—in literature at any rate—were to be a time of rather unfruitful transition. It was as if the great figures, like old beech-trees, would not let any alien growth spring up in their shadow.

Whatever doubts we, of the present day, may harbour about the great Victorians and their pretensions, they were at least magnificently free from anything of the sort about themselves. That is what lends such zest to the sport of baiting their memories. They stare back at us, from their frames and pedestals, with an expres
self-assurance,
for the feelin
reformers have found the whiskers and immaculate appearance of Bright and Cobden a godsend for the purpose of working up an emotional reaction against free imports. The game of Victorian Aunt Sally, first discovered—but unhappily not patented—by Lytton Strachey, has turned out to be one of the most profitable on record. There are few of us who have not

a sneaking sympathy with the unjust Athenian who voted for the ostracism of Aristides, because he was sick of hearing him called the Just.

We, by whom the certainties of our great-grandparents are no longer regarded with becoming seriousness, are able to detect one very significant characteristic of Victorian cocksureness. Certainty was attained by a tacit convention that no one was to blackleg by making too close an examination of the things he was certain about.

To illustrate my meaning, may I be allowed to cite a very early experience of my own?

I had been taught about God by a dear old Victorian clergyman, who explained to me just why God must be. It was extremely simple. The world was so wonderful, that somebody even more wonderful must have made it. Hence God.

I could detect no flaw in this reasoning, but a certain apparent incompleteness. With a faith I never afterwards recovered in the capacity of grown-up people, and particularly reverend grown-ups, to resolve incipient doubt, I proceeded to ask:

"But then, who made God?"

The result was not the explanation I had expected, but an explosion that left me utterly bewildered. I had been brought up in a Christian family. . . . I had been the cause of unutterable grief and disappointment. . . . Satan had quite obviously entered into my heart, not without previous encouragement. . . .

I had, all unwittingly, blundered into what, to every good Victorian, was the unforgivable sin. It was not, as I half suspected myself, that the unknown God-maker was some one not quite respectable. It was simply that I had pried beneath the surface of a belief, that I had not known where to stop short of a logical consequence. It was rather as if a lady who had signed herself "Yours truly" had been embraced on the strength of it by some all too literal swain.

It had not been so in the ages of real faith. To St. Thomas and the medieval schoolmen, it was not enough to believe in God and leave it at that. They would leave no question unanswered that human ingenuity could devise concerning the divine nature and attributes. They had no fear, at the back of their minds, that any danger to faith could lurk in the process of such definition. But the Victorians were common-sense persons, with a shrewd business instinct. In an age of revolutionary change, it was asking for trouble to expose the foundations of anything one wanted preserved. As Lord Melbourne used to say, "Why can't they leave it alone?"

It is doubtful whether many scientists seriously believed, even during the first half of the nineteenth century, that the results of their research were quite on all fours with the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. But so long as they refrained from drawing inferences that had the effect of giving Moses the lie direct, they might pursue their investigations in peace. One of the most remarkable features of the Darwinian controversy is the virtual inability of Darwin's opponents to offer any coherent alternative to his theory. What they really wanted was not truth, but decency. The origin of species, for adults, was like the origin of babies, for children—a thing about which nice little people did not ask questions. The doctor with his bag, and Jehovah with His handful of dust, were all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

It was not only in religion that the Victorians were wont to display their characteristic tactfulness in stopping short of undesirable conclusions. Their so-called utilitarianism, which was about the nearest they could get to a philosophy, consisted, originally, in a calculus of happiness—as if happiness was a thing that could be weighed and distributed like sacks of potatoes. Their political economy owed its form to

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a judicious mental economy. The Jewish banker Ricardo had formulated a theory of rent, which showed very clearly how certain persons might be in a position to levy a toll on the rest of the community in the shape of unearned increment. But Ricardo, being a banker and not a landowner, had näively limited his class of *rentiers* to the owners of land. What was sauce for the landowning goose was by no means sauce for the capitalist gander—not at least till Karl Marx came along, and pushed the theory of his fellow Jew to its entirely indecent conclusion.

We have seen something of Victorian morality. It reposed upon the belief that if you could not be virtuous, you could at least be respectable. Though the streets of London swarmed with harlots and a male virgin was regarded in the smoking-room as a rather poor-spirited fellow, the pretence of chastity was to be kept up. A conspiracy of decent silence was maintained, under the direst penalties, regarding any possible infringement of sexual taboo. Literature was adapted to the requirements of young ladies who were almost unconscious of possessing legs. Actors were evangelists of monogamy on the stage, whatever they might be off it. Mistresses were regretfully admitted by historians to have emphasized the awfulness of Restoration and Regency times. How different had been the orgies of Carlton House and the Pavilion from the domestic amenities of Balmoral and Sandringham!

But, by 1870, it was becoming all too obvious that the foundations of Victorian respectability were undermined. The pretence that belief could be stabilized was no longer plausible. The attempt to suppress Darwin had only recoiled on its authors, by advertising that inoffensive biologist as a sort of Antichrist. When it began to be realized that evolution had come to stay, the conclusion was naturally drawn that religion, having lost its seven days' Creation and its

divine origin of species, was seriously discredited. Not very convincing were belated attempts to lighten the good ship of faith by throwing overboard a minimum of untenable beliefs.

Where was this going to stop? You might abandon the literal interpretation of Genesis—as even a Bishop, Colenso of Natal, had found himself constrained in honesty to do—but if the Creation to-day, why not the Resurrection to-morrow? The New Testament, in Germany, had long been assailed with ruthless ferocity, and George Eliot—a woman too—had brought the infection to British shores, by translating Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, as long ago as 1844. So far these tendencies may only have begun to affect a small group of intellectuals, but anxious watchers could see that the tide of infidelity was steadily rising.

This was bad enough, but not the worst. The Darwinians and Higher Critics at least made it a point of honour to prove themselves as unimpeachably respectable as any of their clerical *opponents*. " Car-
dered
poet,
with flaming hair and passions, who was enthralling educated youth with verse, the like of which, *for* sheer wizardry of lyrical technique, was something new even in English poetry. But Algernon Charles Swinburne, instead of devoting his gifts, like those of Tennyson, to elevating the minds and morals of his readers, luxuriated in a cult of sin of the most refined and Parisian brand, sin, for all practical purposes, being narrowed down to sexual incontinence. Even in his verse, Swinburne was not a very convincing sinner—he was not of the *meaty* stuff of which the real Don Juans are made. When the celebrated actress, Mencken, a formidable, full-blooded woman, and a bit of a poetess herself, took her fellow bard seriously enough to present herself at his chamber door and demand:

The bitter delights of the dark, the feverish, the furtive
caresses,
That murder the youth in a man, or ever the heart have
its will,

the poet was appalled, and only succeeded in achieving Lust by summoning to his aid her sister, Intemperance.

But that the most popular poet of the younger generation should come out openly on the Devil's side, was proof that the Victorian sexual taboos could be flouted with impunity. A new spirit was abroad, and in 1871 Robert Buchanan was thundering from the pulpit of the *Contemporary Review* against the new, fleshly school of poetry—one of whose exponents was Dante Gabriel Rossetti—and depicting in lurid colours the open impudicity of bookshops and posters that affronted, or delighted, the gaze of those who trod the London pavements.

It was the same in every department of thought and life. Everywhere certainties were being called in question, sanctities were flouted, thought was beginning to slide down the inclined plane towards revolution. The movement might, as yet, be slow, but the acceleration was perceptible.

Victorian political economy was going the way of Victorian religion and Victorian morality. John Stuart Mill, whose writing had constituted the very Bible of capitalist individualism, had, by his own all too candid admission, knocked the bottom out of his own dogma. Henceforth there was no recognized authority in economic matters, and the ordinary man was content to let the professors disagree while he trusted to his own common sense and prejudice. To Socialism, as to paganism and infidelity, the path was open, though there might still be a long way to travel. But that expression of ineffable self-complacency, that unquestioning assurance of living in a safe world, that beams at us from the features of those frock-coated

and whiskered gentlemen portrayed by the elder Lucas, and even from oleos and faded photographic groups of the fifties and sixties, is getting rare in the seventies. Towards the end of the century we shall look for it in vain.

BOOK II

THE SEVENTIES

CHAPTER I

THE SENSE OF SECURITY

The reading of history renders us liable to misunderstand the perspective in which events appeared to their contemporaries. We unconsciously imagine that the interest of the average man and woman was focussed on the same things as those which are passed fit for the dignity of record. In our own time this is probably nearer to the truth than in that of our grandparents.

We, of the nineteen-thirties, differ from our grandparents in being troubled about many things, at home and abroad, because fear of a by no means remote future has entered into our hearts. But the English of the eighteen-seventies were in the happy position of taking their security so much for granted that they could afford to forget the weightier issues of statesmanship,

> What the Swede intends and what the French,

and devote themselves rather to the embellishment of civilization than to the strengthening of its foundations.

They had their grievances. There was an income tax of fourpence in the pound, "the impost", as Mr. Punch pathetically called it, "from which you must never expect to be free"—and he even went so far as to hint that the middle class might follow

the example of the lower, and demonstrate against it in the Park. But in 1873, Mr. Lowe succeeded in reducing the tax to threepence, and Mr. Gladstone, at the dissolution next year, dangled before the electorate the prospect of abolishing it altogether.

There was also that perennial grievance of housewives, since the days when it was first voiced by Defoe, that the domestic servants of their time exceeded those of any previous time in arrogance, laziness and incompetence, the favourite target of criticism being the lordly and pampered men-servants, who were still to be found, in considerable numbers and resplendent liveries, in upper-class households. The problem of the drunken servant was acute to an extent almost forgotten nowadays.

It would be wrong to take such grumbles too seriously. They are only significant as being among the most substantial the time could produce.

It was a very complacent time, and England was much occupied with her own, often trivial affairs. The year 1871 saw the consummation of the German triumph over France, and the brief but shocking episode of the Paris Commune, but it is doubtful whether either of these was so much in the public eye as the famous Tichborne case, one of the crudest and most sensational attempts ever made to sound the abyss of human gullibility. A certain Arthur Orton, a hulking illiterate of low birth and dubious record, had had the bright idea, when in Australia, of claiming to be Sir Roger Tichborne, who had disappeared, together with the ship in which he had been sailing, in the year of the Alma. The fact that the real Sir Roger's mother, whose mind was beginning to fail, was pathetically determined—even before the claimant's appearance—to believe her son restored to her, may have had some influence in inducing other old acquaintances of Sir Roger's to take leave of whatever critical faculties they may

have possessed, and believe his slim figure to have swelled out into the enormous proportions of Orton. The game was up when the claimant's pretensions were at last tested in court. In a trial of over a hundred days, his shrewdness and effrontery were pitted in vain against the long-drawn but masterly cross-examination of Sir John Coleridge. At last the unhappy jury, who had been dragged for over three months from their normal avocations, could stand it no longer, and declared that they had no need of further witness, whereupon the claimant was non-suited and promptly arrested on a charge of perjury.

After another trial of prodigious length he was sent to do a stretch of fourteen years, but not even so was the popular sympathy for his cause quenched. His counsel, a certain Dr. Kenealy, who had not only grossly mismanaged the case but got himself dis-barred, was elected, on the strength of his own and his client's grievances, to Parliament, where he could not even get two members to introduce him—that ceremony having to be formally dispensed with for his benefit. Orton's adventure had cost the Tich-borne estate upwards of £90,000, and the country considerably more.

But at least the claimant had provided some much-needed excitement. There is this disadvantage in times of peace and safety—that these very blessings are generators of a certain boredom. The craving for excitement is deep-rooted in human nature. It is the existence of this craving that accounts for the vogue of that incredible novelist calling herself Ouida. This lady could transport her readers into a world of aristocratic and fabulously wealthy super-men, a world that had no more connection with reality than that of a dream. Her splendid guardsmen would ride their own chargers to victory in the Grand National, or drop nonchalantly into an eight-oared boat, at a moment's notice, and stroke the crew

to victory in some great race. One of them, pursued in the moonlight by the police and inhabitants of a German town, finds his path blocked by a cart and a couple of mules, and, relaxing for a moment his habitual languor, "rose lightly in the air . . . and with a single running leap, cleared the width of the mules' backs, and landing safely on the farther side, dashed on, scarcely pausing for breath". That particular passage is of the late sixties, but it was during the seventies that Ouida was at the zenith of her reputation.

More important people than Ouida were alive to the advantages that might accrue from exploiting this desire for more colour and excitement than everyday life seemed capable of affording. Among them was that shrewdest of statesmen—the "player", so it was said, who had been "given" to the Tory team—Benjamin Disraeli. He had taken the extinction of his brief premiership, in 1868, with unruffled calm, and sat down to wait, as he had already waited from late youth to early old age, for the hour of his triumph. He was not perturbed by the extraordinary energy and success with which Mr. Gladstone's ministry seemed to be managing the affairs of the nation. Peace abroad, economy at home, one great measure of reform following another—these were not enough. Education and the ballot, a purged civil-service and a simplified law, a reformed army and a lowered—perhaps a disappearing—income-tax, were not what the average elector was demanding at the moment. He took these things more or less as a matter of course. What he really wanted was for his politicians, like his novelists, to conjure up for him a dream world of romance and adventure, of dazzling coups, of boundless vistas, of pomp and magnificence and Empire. And this Disraeli could offer, with all the persuasiveness of the Oriental merchant unfolding his wares in the bazaar.

Happy the nation that has nothing worse to fear than *ennui*! And this certainly seemed to be the lot of England in the years that immediately followed the Franco-German War. That war brought a period of unrest to a close. The sword had decided all that most obviously called for decision. The unity of Germany, of Italy, of the United States was established, beyond the possibility of dispute. It was a good time for the publishers of atlases—the patchwork confusion of Central Europe called for replacement by simpler, more rational boundaries. And these boundaries no nation, except beaten and crippled France, had much interest in altering.

England herself, like the business nation she was, lost no time in profiting by the dissensions of her rivals. The war had left her commercial leadership more unchallenged than ever, and had created a temporary demand for her products. Up to 1874, the volume of her foreign trade increased more rapidly than ever, employment was rife and investors bullish. As is the nature of bulls, these creatures proved to have charged blindly, and a period of depression and disappointment succeeded. It was discovered that in the eagerness to avoid the low returns that await capital in periods of prosperity, British investors had put much too much of their savings into capitalizing undeveloped or backward countries. Not for the last time, there was a slump in foreign investments, Turkey being the worst defaulter. A particularly disgraceful smash at home, that of the City of Glasgow Bank, produced a collapse of confidence among investors that fell not far short of a panic. But though the slump, like all other slumps, was thought at the time to be the worst on record, there was no question of the fabric of British prosperity being seriously undermined. Those who had suffered worst were those who, as Sir Robert Giffen put it, had invested so high and

speculatively as practically to be living on their capital.

But investors were not to be baffled so easily. The problem was how to combine high returns with security on overseas investments, when capital employed at home fetched something round about a miserable three per cent. The dishonest old Turk could not be distrained upon, still less the Republics of South America or the States of the U.S.A. But there were large tracts of the earth that could be not only capitalized but prevented from defaulting on their interest. Of what use was a soldier who could not combine his honourable profession with that of bailiff, or of any Empire that did not pay dividends? The slump of the mid-seventies was calculated to start practical men thinking imperially.

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRIT OF MANLINESS

It would be a mistake to think that during the early seventies the average Englishman's thoughts were greatly occupied with foreign or imperial matters. The country was still complacently insular, in spite of Matthew Arnold. The French influence, that had imparted brilliance and sparkle to aristocratic society in the eighteenth century, was only powerful in such limited spheres as those of fashion, cooking, and the pleasures of the half-world. In spite of the Crimean War, the tradition of hostility between the two nations persisted—a juvenile tug of war was still known as "French and English". It was firmly believed that an ordinary Englishman was a superior being to any Frenchman whatever, from the fact of his being more manly. "French polish" was heartily despised. In Canon Farrar's school story *St. Winifred's*, the most odious of all the bully-villains who stalk through his pages has this nickname attached to him, and preludes his devilries with a Parisian and sardonic urbanity of phrase.

There was, indeed, something highly suspicious to John Bull in anything savouring of excessive politeness. He rather prided himself on what the Frenchman would have characterized as brutality. Even in the most exalted circles, there was a good deal of masculine horseplay and practical joking. In one typical country mansion a clergyman, who had indulged in an early dip in the lake, had his clothes abstracted by the sons of the house, and had finally to make his way back in a state of nudity,

to be admitted by the governess. These same sons succeeded in nearly blinding another guest by offering him a cigar filled with gunpowder.

The foreigner who arrived at our shores was left in no doubt of the superior manliness of the English temperament. At the seaside town of Folkestone there was no more popular amusement than that of baiting the passengers who had just landed from the Channel steamers, often prostrated by sea-sickness. The Company had thoughtfully provided a path in the open for these victims to run the gauntlet between the boat and the train. This path was lined by an expectant mob. No sooner was the gangway down, than there was a delighted shout of "Here they come!" and the fun began. A green-faced sufferer would be asked if he would like a bit of mutton fat; a stout gentleman would be greeted with cries of "Here's Tichborne"; another, looking more dead than alive, would be consoled by the reflection that he wouldn't die till he was hung; while an old lady—if we may trust the authority of the *Graphic*—would be asked, "Have you been sick too?" and then shoved forward with the questioner's stick. The strict chaperonage to which young women were subjected will appear less unreasonable when we know that it was no uncommon experience for ladies to have their faces and clothes spat upon by roughs. There was little mercy or chivalry for the unprotected female in that manly environment.

A certain bucolic violence was considered by no means inconsistent with the character of a gentleman. Masters of hounds, in particular, were hardly considered up to their job unless they were capable of giving rein to ungovernable tempers in managing their fields. Of one famous old Master, in Devonshire, it is recorded that his habit of cursing was so ingrained that he once broke off in the midst of reading the Lord's prayer to his family and servants,

to ask who in the name of Him he had just been addressing was an individual—whose carnal affections and eternal destiny were specified with a wealth of descriptive detail—crossing the lawn. The butler, rising from his knees, explained that this was the new keeper, upon which his employer, duly satisfied, resumed the prayer exactly where it had been left off. The old Duke of Cambridge owed no small part of the popularity he enjoyed in the army to the violence of his language. The speech that he rather unwillingly consented to make to an audience of gentlemen cadets, enjoining them to a greater strictness of moral behaviour, is surely one of the most forcible lay sermons on record—commencing, as it is said to have done, "You dirty little . . ." But no second performance seems to have been called for.

Nothing more characteristic of the time could be imagined than the conduct of E. M. Grace, cricketer and coroner, on being told by some spectator not to hold an inquest on a hand that he was wringing in agony after stopping some terrific cut to point. The coroner promptly dived into the crowd, seized the offender by the ear, and marched him publicly off the ground.

There is perhaps some connection between this aggressive manliness and the almost equally aggressive hairiness flaunted by the male sex at this time. The Dundrearys of the sixties were going out of fashion, only to become joined together into full-bottomed beards. In the *Graphic* advertisement columns of the 18th of August, 1877, a certain Mr. Mechi, a London shop-keeper, thus reminiscently addresses "his old friends and customers, the public": "It is now fifty years ago since I first commenced a business in Leadenhall Street, and what changes have taken place! Then everyone shaved and my razor and razor strop trade was immense; now moustache and beard are the order

of the day, and the razor and strop trade is completely defunct." It was pre-eminently the decade of beards, though whiskers still gave point to the joke about entangled ear-rings, and the moustache was also beginning to lengthen and thicken and sometimes droop with a walrus-like suggestion, the impression aimed at being obviously one of virile fierceness. Mr. Kipling's dreadfully fast young thing of the eighties, whom scandal reported, with bated breath, to have compared a moustacheless kiss to an egg without salt, was probably voicing a pretty general, though it is to be hoped generally unexpressed feminine verdict. Such flaunting symbols of masculinity as the heavy dragoon's correspondingly heavy moustache, the mandril's scarlet nose, and the stag's antlers, usually have a sexual significance.

But the male sex was already grievously handicapped in the matter of self-expression by the ban that had been imposed upon the display of colour, except on special occasions, or to a severely limited extent. Even the soldier, in England, was not allowed the advantage of his uniform for a moment longer than it was required for professional purposes. The scarlet—absurdly called pink—of the hunting field, had been more or less in the same category so long as hunting had been a pursuit confined to gentlemen and to ladies—by courtesy—of the Lucy Glitters type. But now, if the scarlet would not come to the ladies, the ladies went to the scarlet by joining in the chase themselves, where, by a strange reversion to the past, they themselves appeared in sober and inconspicuois hues, while the male flaunted his scarlet coat, his gilded buttons, and his contrasted white stock and breeches, in the light of day.

One pleasing way of relieving the drabness of male attire was by the use of flowers. One of a fashionable young man's chief pre-occupations was with the daily selection and arrangement of his buttonhole.

CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN OF THE PERIOD

The woman of the seventies, if she still had to wait for her rights in other things, was accorded greater freedom than the male in the creation of what is now known as sex-appeal. With the coming of the seventies that freedom began to be used, more frankly than before, as a tight-fitting cloak of lasciviousness. It has always been a feminine object either to stimulate male desire by the exposure and emphasis of some part of the body, or to excite the imagination by concealment and mystery. The fifties and sixties had been dominated by the idea of romance, and had used both methods accordingly. The most romantic part of the body was what was delicately alluded to as the bosom, and accordingly such special opportunities for attracting a mate as those of the ballroom were exploited by a dress cut low enough to expose the division of the breasts. But the lower part of the body remained shrouded, or rather crinolined, in discreet mystery. The wintry moon of romance would never have thrown warm gules on Madeleine's fair sit-upon. The prime object of the tremendous lower expansion that the crinoline was one method of securing, was to impart a suggestion of queenly dignity and a certain aloofness. If it did have the disadvantage of making young women much too much like dowagers, it was an invitation to romantic swains to strive for a prize of such super-feminine attractions, half-angel and half-bird, a legless, passionless icicle to all beyond the confines of that majestic canopy.

But the seventies saw a highly significant change in the method of feminine approach. Even before the opening of the decade, the idea of mystery was becoming a little played out. The crinoline had gone, at first only in favour of a voluminousness of skirt that produced much the same effect. But soon the intention became apparent to give the go-by to the romantic imagination, and reinforce the appeal of upper by that of the lower part of the body. Attention was now solicited for the buttocks. The fashion was not original. Posterior adornment is an art successfully practised by the males of numerous species of monkeys, and in certain African tribes rival beauties compete in the exaggeration of what to a European is the humblest part of the anatomy. It was fortunately not necessary for civilized women to torture themselves, like their black sisters, in order to stick out plausibly behind. The Northern climate and Christian religion secured that this latest attraction should, even if advertised, be kept under cover. Beneath skirt and petticoat, it was possible to suggest the presence of an even more enormous protuberance than could be raised on the banks of Timbuctoo. Hence the false buttock, the pullback or bustle, with which women did not hesitate to cumber themselves in the cause of sexual selection.

This lasted, more or less, till the end of the eighties. It was during the first phase, up to about 1875, that the exaggeration of the buttocks was carried to its greatest length. Then came five years or so of reaction. It was, in fact, suspected that the hips might exercise an equal or superior fascination, and accordingly dresses were drawn to the utmost possible tightness and smoothness across them, while the bustle dwindled at last to nothing, though its suggestiveness was retained to some extent by looping up the back of the dress. But during the eighties the pendulum swung back again, and enormous

buttocks—or the suggestion of them—became the modest pride of maid and matron.

It was not only below the waist that feminine charms were obtruded. There was a frank suggestiveness about the costume of the seventies that embraced the whole body *in its purview. The curves of the* figure were seductively exaggerated in front as well as behind. If the bustle was used to swell out the hinder parts, the same office could be performed for the breast by suitabl
from pictures and
was freely employe
women of the seventies had considerably more expansive busts than those of normal times. To complete the effect, the *chignon*, or piled-up back hair, had to undergo an expansion proportionate to that directly beneath it. The resources of the average human head, being unequal to furnishing the enormous amount of hair required for this purpose, had to be supplemented from outside, one reputed source of supply being the hair cut off in hospital from fever patients.

Apart from this stuffing out of what were supposed to be the most attractive parts of the figure, every effort was made to enhance its charms by making the clothes fit as tightly as a glove. We have seen how this had been done to show off the curve of the hips; the method was equally applicable to the belly, which was advertised with a frankness—in certain types of costume—that left nothing except colour to the imagination. All sorts of means were employed to produce this clinging tightness, so different from the ample proportions of the sixties. The Empress of Austria was even said to have had her riding habit sewed on over her naked skin.[1] There was talk of chamois leather underclothing towards the end of the decade—a horribly frowsty expedient.

[1] *Modes and Manners of the XIX Century*, Fischel and Boehn, Vol. IV, p. 82.

It was not enough to exaggerate the female posterior, it also called for adornment. This was no doubt highly inconvenient, as it was obviously a matter of extreme difficulty to take a seat without crushing such elegant additions.

"Shall we sit down?" asks a gentleman at a dance—according to *Punch*—and receives the pathetic reply, "I should like to, but my dressmaker says I mustn't."

It was, in fact, a regular duty of a partner to tear off such portions of the cascade of tulle as happened to get detached in the course of dancing. Ladies invariably returned home with considerably less behind them than when they had set forth. This did not entail the scrapping of the dress itself, which might last for a good many dances, but it always required to have its "waterfall" renewed between each of them.

There was never a time when the dictates of health and hygiene were more utterly ignored in the pursuit of sexual attractiveness. Frances Power Cobbe, one of the pioneers of female emancipation, enumerates, among the causes of "the little health of women", ferocious tight-lacing, heavy dragging skirts, high-heels, pullbacks, discouragement of appetite, and lack of healthy occupation for mind and body. And yet a belief was growing up in the advantages of outdoor exercise. The clash between the new ideals and the old was apt to produce grotesque results. How the first lady tennis players, with their skirts, gaily beribboned fore and aft and drawn tightly round the hips and knees, ever got the ball over the net—if they ever did—remains a mystery.

Looking back through the illustrated weeklies of the period, we shall find that the craze for hiking was rife as early as 1877. It is no longer, we are told, the fashion for girls and women to be delicate. Wives have taken to accompanying their husbands,

sisters their brothers, on walking tours. It is advisable, therefore, to know what luggage to take, or rather to send on such a tour.

It would be well, the lady hiker is told, to have forwarded to the first proposed halting-place two large trunks—those monstrous receptacles that are still occasionally to be found in lumber rooms—containing linen, dress bonnets, hats, and all manner of miscellaneous finery. The linen trunk should be liberally provided with paper cuffs, collars, and fancy dibs. The dress trunk should contain a black silk costume, with a good, plain, long train skirt, and two bodices, with bows and ruchings and collars according to the complexion. In addition to the trunks, four stylish hats and bonnets are to be packed in a square carton box, the feathers and flowers having been previously detached and arranged in the aforesaid box.

As for the actual hiking costume, this is to be made so as to touch the ground, the skirt to be either looped up with two buttons or tied up with strings. Beneath this flops a finely quilted alpaca petticoat, on either side of which is a wide, deep pocket, in which are to be crammed a perfect museum of things, including easy slippers, a large Shetland shawl, a small flannel dressing-jacket, brush, comb, and comprehensive work-case, but not, apparently, a toothbrush. The hat need only be trimmed with a band and small wing. A mackintosh cape with a covering of the same material for the hat completes an equipment which makes that of the White Knight seem sane and economical.

As for bathing costumes, these, we are told, are becoming more stylish every season. Slender figures are recommended to wear loose, full, trousers reaching to the ankles and a short blouse fastened in at the waist, while the stout ones would do best to wallow in long jackets.

et us conclude this list by specifying the kind of ss recommended for breakfast at a country house it.

“ White cambric, the front and side breadth made ith alternate strips of torchon lace insertion and athered cambric; petticoat of rose-pink cambric; ichu to match; a quaint little pink and white cambric nat, trimmed with convolvulus.”

Does this, one asks, mean that the wearer has breakfast in her room? The dress would seem to point to it—but why, in that case, a hat trimmed with convolvuli? [1]

Such details may be esteemed unworthy the dignity of historical record. But there are few things that give a better insight into the spirit of an age than its fashions. Those of the seventies point to a reversion from a rather prudish romanticism to a frank sensuousness, such as had been heralded by the poems of Swinburne. Not that there was any marked decrease in prudery—such a title to a play as *The New Magdalen* was considered gravely indelicate, and an amended version of *John Peel* was still in vogue for those families who did not like so blasphemous a suggestion as that John Peel's view-halloo would awaken the dead. It was as late as the eighties tha a man was left to drown in a lake because som ladies in a boat were too modest to fish him o naked. But Prudery is ever the handmaid of Lubrici masking as her enemy.

It seems to have been felt, towards the end the sixties, that a new spirit was beginning to cap the rising generation of women. Mrs. Lynn Li wrote a series of slashing articles in the *Sat Review* about “ the Girl of the Period . . . a cre who dyes her hair and paints her face, as the articles of her personal religion—a creature sole idea of life is fun, whose sole aim is unbo

[1] All these are to be found in the *Graphic*, 1st Augu

luxury; and whose dress is the chief object of such thought and intellect as she possesses". Or as a rhymster puts it:

> Dresses dropt 'neath palpitating shoulders,
> Dresses raised to show the moulded knee;
> Thus these girls of *theirs* attract beholders,
> Careless what bewitched beholders see.

Shocking indeed when England's budding womanhood

> finds for model the Hetaira—
> In her wickedest and fastest mood.

Making every allowance for journalistic exaggeration—and on so popular a theme—we can hardly doubt that there must have been some fire beneath this smoke, a fire which self-appointed censors of morality did not hesitate to characterize at the time as that of Hell, but which many of our own contemporaries would welcome as the evidence of a healthy animality.

Gone was the round-faced virginity of Leech's ringleted darling, the seductive blend of innocence and dependence that had done such execution among the heavy swells of the mid-century. It was as if the new generation were suffering from an inferiority complex, and nervously anxious to assert its claims to equal and something more than equal consideration against masculine arrogance.

Punch, that unrivalled mirror of average opinion, talks in 1874 of the "loudness, fastness and slang of the girl of the period". It was what we should consider very mild slang nowadays—such expressions as "awfully jolly sad", and a use of "ain't" on all possible occasions. But *Punch* also introduces us to a new type of young woman, his Miss Sharpleigh or Miss Sinical, whom he apparently admires rather than otherwise, and who specializes in cutting and ill-natured repartees.

When some innocent young man remarks to his partner that reversing has gone out, he is annihilated by the information that it has never come in, and the still more unfortunate swain who confides that the sight of a ghost would leave him a chattering idiot is promptly asked: "Have you seen a ghost?" which does not appear to be humour of a much more subtle or urbane description than the private schoolboy's reply to the interrogation "What?"

"Squat!
You're a fool and I'm not."

The evidence not only of the printed word, but of still living memory, suggests that social intercourse must have been, to say the least of it, rather exhausting. The criticism that Matthew Arnold made about the brutality of English letters in the sixties, would apply equally to English polite conversation in the seventies. We get the impression of a kind of competitive smartness, a polish as of rapiers. To score gracefully or neatly off some member of the company was much to be desired, and not to be able to keep up the interchange of rather stilted badinage was to proclaim oneself a social failure. In the hands of the less conversationally gifted members of society, this sort of thing could hardly fail to degenerate into open rudeness.

There is a valuable little book, current at this time, which shows very clearly the kind of talk to be aimed at in really genteel circles. It is called *Society Small Talk*, and purports, like more than one similar treatise of a later date, to emanate from a Member of the Aristocracy. Its general get-up, and the distinguished publishing house from which it emanates, suggest at least a circulating library audience.

The modern reader will at first be inclined to suspect that the whole thing is a leg-pull, but a

careful examination will convince him that the manual is perfectly serious, and compiled with a good deal of care and ingenuity. Perhaps the most noticeable feature of this kind of conversation, as compared with that of our own day, is its extraordinary sex-consciousness. A woman is seldom allowed to be an ordinary human being; the tone adopted towards her by men is either one of stereotyped adulation or else of bantering superiority. One notes the constantly recurring references to "you ladies" or "we ladies", while no gentleman seems able to get out two consecutive sentences without some reference to the entirely stereotyped personal attractions of his fair and charming partner. We wonder what a bright young thing of the nineteen-thirties would make of an airy nothing—to adopt the vernacular of the seventies—couched in the following terms:

"I envy that butterfly perched so daintily on your hair close to that shell-like ear. What secrets would I not whisper were I so near! Happy butterfly!"

Her reply would most probably be a plain intimation to her partner that he was tight. Not so that of her grandmother. She would not, like great-grandmother, have blushed all over—the remark would not have struck her in the light of an amorous declaration, but of a conversational challenge. And if she did not want to be put down as a hopeless fool, she would have had to counter with some such remark as:

"The butterfly is not so happy as you think; I shut it up in a velvet case when I go home for fear of losing it. Now one could not shut you up . . ."

And this sort of sparring might go on between a couple of practised hands, till the music struck up for the next dance.

Or let us listen to the conversation at a dinner party, one of eight people, and every one of them a master, or mistress, of verbal fence.

Mr. A. leads off by remarking that the illness of a certain Lord is believed to have come from the shock to his system caused by drinking iced water.

"Not a bit of it," cuts in Mr. B., who, having killed two birds with one stone by contradicting Mr. A. and displaying his superior knowledge of aristocratic maladies, then proceeds to an intriguing fragment of autobiography: "I have drunk water all my life, and the shocks my system has received have not sprung from that source."

Here Mrs. C., a cheerful soul, takes up the running:

"Shocks are very serious things, I think; that which affects the body too often affects the mind, the one reacting upon the other; that is why I think sudden death is so terrible to the survivors, though I must not be lugubrious. I was thinking of something rather sad that I heard before I came here to-night, but I ought to bring a merry heart to a feast."

Whereupon the host, Mr. D., seeing an opportunity for a compliment, pounces with:

"In bringing yourself, Mrs. C., you bring the best part of the feast."

But he has exposed a flank to Miss E., who does her best to put him out of countenance by asking what in that case were she herself and Mrs. F., and whether there are not any compliments in Mr. D.'s store for them too. But Mr. D. is equal to the occasion.

"A hundred, my dear Miss E., if you would only give me the opportunity of making them; opportunity is a great ally."

The company in general, and Mrs. D. in particular, are given no time to wonder precisely what D. is driving at, or who he is getting at, for Mr. G. caps him by observing sagely that propinquity is an even greater ally than opportunity.

"Half the marriages that take place are, I should

say, the result of propinquity and opportunity combined."

The conversation is now fairly started off upon the subject of the tender passion, and goes on merrily, with a strong seasoning of arch personalities, for the rest of the meal.

The most surprising of all conversational leads is one recommended for a fashionable musical party:

"*I suppose one ought not to talk while the music* is going on, but I should like to tell you a story I heard the other day."

To which "the most flattering rejoinder", though hardly flattering to the poor singer, is said to be:

"Oh please do, I should so like to hear it."

It is again necessary to assure the reader that this was perfectly serious advice, and that it probably did not strike anyone to regard it in a different light—during the seventies.

All letters and memoirs and reminiscences of that time show to what an extent the business of pleasure was a whole-time job. The lives of those who could afford not to work—an immensely larger proportion of the community than nowadays—seem to have been passed in a perpetual round of balls, dinners, musical parties, small-and-earlies, and tea drinkings—now ceasing to be known as kettledrums—while in the country there were archery, croquet, tennis, picnics and river parties galore. The strict limitations upon feminine activities during the mid-century were being gradually relaxed, and most women had a good deal more liberty without any idea of the more serious interests that were as yet the monopoly of a small, earnest and dowdy band of New Women. It is during this period that even that crusty old Radical Mr. Punch begins to put off his middle-class earnestness, and transfers his interest from the old codgers of Leech to the social butterflies and pushers of Du Maurier.

If we must provide decades with nicknames, the Frivolous Seventies would seem a good deal more to the point than the Naughty Nineties. Frivolity was the keynote of that time—the light-heartedness and light-headedness of those who take their world and its permanence so much for granted, that it never occurs to them to be really serious about anything. As long as the ice held and there were no danger boards, so long the skaters were free to devote their whole attention to the pretty, meaningless figures they were cutting on the surface. God could always be relied upon to provide against a thaw. For it was still—to that extent—a God-believing time.

CHAPTER IV

THE GENTEEL ENVIRONMENT

If we are right in accepting the evidence of clothes as expressing the spirit of the time, we may expect to find this evidence confirmed by that of furniture and household decoration. The interior, of course, changes less quickly than a costume, for though clothes seldom last for more than a few years at the outside, a good piece of furniture may remain in use for centuries. But taste—including bad taste—is not to be denied, and even things that were originally beautiful may be turned to uses

Quite from the purpose of the things themselves.

In the seventies there was a change of taste corresponding closely enough to the change of fashion. The earlier Victorian surroundings had often been ugly enough in all conscience, though it must not be forgotten that that age could produce one of the greatest of all English masters of interior decoration in Alfred Stevens. This ugliness, even at its worst, had a certain honesty that made it expressive of something, if only of the solid and smug respectability that its owners prized more than virtue. There is a portentous dignity about those horsehair sofas and mahogany wardrobes that, if it reminds us rather of a provincial mayor standing on his hearthrug and sticking out his stomach, is not without a certain endearing quaintness that you get in faded daguerreotypes of family groups.

But the new fashions are ceasing to be concerned with dignity, and are beginning to reflect the com-

mercial spirit and hustling tempo of the age by straining after obvious and showy effects, cramming all the goods, as one might say, into the shop window. This we have noted in our study of clothes, where the art of advertisement is being developed on modern lines, though the part of the body on which it is chiefly displayed is hardly to be described as a frontage. These lavish additions, these insertions and flounces and enlargements are, however, by no means confined to one part of the dress; from where bonnet balances insecurely on coiffure to where skirt meets dirt there is the same effect of over-crowding, the itch to get the utmost value for money out of every detail, regardless of proportion and unity.

We have a vivid description of one of the newly built houses in a district like Kensington in an excellent little manual on House Decoration by two Miss Garretts, published in 1876. "With the outside aspect of this house", they say, "everyone is familiar. We need not therefore stop to describe the stucco and the graining, the frills and the furbelows, the frantic efforts of the builder to make everything appear what it is not. . . ." Putting "dressmaker" instead of "builder" this would serve as an excellent description of the type of dress that perhaps—is it too cynical to suggest?—the authoresses themselves were constrained to wear at the time these lines were penned.

It was not only a question of choice but of necessity. Machine production was beginning to tighten its grip on home and workshop. The enormously increased and increasing population had to be housed as well as fed, and this was beyond the resources of handiwork. And now it was becoming apparent that Gresham's Law, "Bad money drives out good", had its analogy in other spheres than that of finance. In a machine age, artistically bad products drive out good, for the reason that they can be turned out in

greater quantities for less money. John Ruskin might preach and William Morris might put into practice the traditions of sound and loving craftsmanship that had inspired the Middle Ages, but Gothic itself was capable of being seized upon by the enterprising capitalist, and turned out correctly to style in his factories. What did the ordinary Philistine care, or know, about any difference between handmade and standardized detail except that of price? And when things of real beauty were fashioned as they were by William Morris, the high price of so restricted a product prevented it from reaching more than a small minority of the well-to-do.

It was, indeed, the ironic fate of those who strove hardest to encourage the love and understanding of the arts, that their efforts should have contributed to the triumph not of the Muses they served but of the commercial Mammon they detested. The more there was discovered and written about art, the easier it became to standardize mechanically the style of this or that period, until the whole environment of God's image was put into cheap fancy dress, and such abominations were achieved as the Tudor Lounge of a hotel and the Louis Seize smoking-room of a liner, until—to come down to our own time—the motorist out of town passes between interminable white ranks of Baronial Mansions on one side of the road, and Comfy Palaces on the other, where a few months before smiled the open country-side.

The seventies had not learnt enough about the Muses to prostitute them on this heroic scale; what they did was in more naïve defiance of good taste and artistic decency. Their one object seemed to be to make the greatest possible display on the cheap. The Miss Garretts have a chapter on "Houses as they are" which should be read by every one who wants to realize of what the seventies were really capable.

They usher us into the hall through " a front door that looks like bronze and feels like wood ". We find the walls covered with paper made to imitate marble, " the kind of marble imitated being supposed to indicate the financial condition of the owner ". Doors and woodwork are disguised as oak or walnut or marble. The staircase is lit by a stentorian window of ground glass with a violently coloured border. The balustrade is of cast iron tortured into fantastic shapes and enriched with coarsely moulded ornamentation, probably emphasized by gilding.

The dining-room is calculated to sit heavier on the soul than the greasiest and stodgiest meal that even an English cook is capable of sending up to it. The walls are covered with crimson and gold paper or alternatively painted pale green ; the mantelpiece is of black marble, the curtains of crimson rep ; the sideboard is of mahogany, surmounted by a curly mirror, and curved and distorted with misbegotten ingenuity to contradict every principle of sound construction. Plain or gilded wicker screens, then just coming into fashion, protect the room from the gaze of passers by. For this, the public ought to have been grateful.

As for the drawing-room, this is at the mercy of feminine taste, and of what that taste was capable we have already gained some inkling in the matter of clothes. Here we have " a watered gold or sky-blue paper hung upon the walls . . . enrichments of ceiling and cornice with all colours of the rainbow . . . a carpet whereupon the whole contents of a conservatory have been upset . . . a round centre table whose legs bristle with leaves and flowers and twining snakes all glued together in one shapeless mass ; and the chairs *en suite* and covered with turquoise blue rep, their brilliance preserved from tarnish by crocheted antimacassars ". The sofa is a horror of little ease and less beauty, with lumpy

padding, head one way and legs the other, and ornament made to stick out wherever it can be most in the way. There are bright green silk panels on the walnut piano; there is a cabinet of unplausibly imitated buhl; there is also a walnut chiffonier. An appropriate setting, we cannot help thinking, for its fair inmates, with their stuffed chignons and bedizened buttocks.

We may accompany our guides for a moment into the bedroom. Here the state of things is even more lamentable, because the builder, having lavished all his attention on the "show" rooms, has made these as square and dark and dingy as possible. There are whity-grey wallpaper, maple-painted woodwork, flimsy sashes, much too weak for the big sheets of plate glass that they contain, a muddy-looking chimneypiece of marble or some composition resembling it, a cast-iron grate that looks as if no fire could ever burn cheerfully in it, white finger plates and handles to the doors. The bed is of brass or iron, but the furniture-maker being ashamed of this new fashion, has plastered it with ormulu ornament and twisted it out of all straightness and simplicity. The wardrobe affords the greatest opportunity of all for the display of bad taste and bad workmanship. Panels of dark wood frowning at the light wood of which the rest is made, imitation inlaying painted on the surface, prehistoric flowers and birds . . . after this specimen we may forbear to inspect wash-stand, looking-glass, and other items, catalogued indifferently as Gothic, Medieval, or Early English. The very recital of such horrors becomes painful after a time.

Let us take one typical advertisement of the kind that were published daily in the seventies:

"Fine Italian Walnut Drawing-room Furniture, comprising a luxurious lounge, lady's and gentleman's easy and six well-carved chairs upholstered

in rich silk, centre table on massive carved pillar and claws, the top beautifully inlaid with marqueterie, large size chimney glass in handsome oil-gilt frame, chiffonière with marble top, lofty plate-glass back and three doors; lady's work table lined with silk, occasional table on spiral supports, two papier maché chairs and coffee table to match, five tier what-not, pair of handsome ruby lustres, and gilt and steel fender and fire irons, with ormolu heads, etc., etc., etc."[1]

By no means all people in the seventies rested content with an attitude of universal and complacent Philistinism in matters of taste. Such an accusation would have been hotly resented by many ladies who prided themselves upon the artistic appearance of their drawing-rooms. There was probably more written and talked during that decade about the conscious pursuit of beauty than during all the previous years of the reign put together. It is a mistake to imagine, as some people do nowadays, that the æsthetic movement began with Oscar Wilde in the eighties. It was in full swing at least by 1875, and if it had a literary prophet, it was not Wilde, but Walter Pater. It was also closely connected with the Pre-Raphaelite movement, now of a generation's standing, no longer therefore a heresy, but a thing to be admired by people who would be thought cultured. Du Maurier's æsthetic women, like Mrs. Cimabue Brown, were obviously trying to look like Rossetti or Burne-Jones pictures.

The æsthetic fashion, when it asserted its sway over the drawing-room, did so in two principal ways. The first was in a craze for musical parties, at which, by those who could afford it, the most celebrated singers and musicians were engaged to perform. If the jokes of the time are anything to go by, these parties must have been rather trying affairs, a large

[1] Cited in *The Drawing Room*, by Mrs. Orrinsmith.

part of the audience regarding them as an excuse for flirtation or gossip, in tones more or less subdued.

More lasting in its effects was the passion for acquiring the products of Chinese and Japanese art. This was nothing new. Readers of Wycherley will remember how one of his funniest and bawdiest scenes is concerned with a *double entente* on the meaning of the word "china". Queen Mary of Orange was an enthusiastic collector, and gets soundly rapped over the knuckles for her pains by Macaulay. So the "Chinamania", as it was called at the time, might have been classed as a revival, much to be desired, of a time-honoured custom. But not only was the taste of Victorian England very different from that of William and Mary's day, but the Far East had changed too. China might still, in spite of the violence and extortion to which she was subjected by Christian civilization, be essentially the same China as that of 1700, but a new Japan was even now coming into being, and it was the art of that country that principally excited the admiration of the English æsthetes. In 1700 very little had been known about Japan, because her people had had as much experience as they desired of intercourse with the West, and had very sensibly determined to isolate themselves and preserve their civilization intact. But this did not happen to suit a capitalist civilization with goods to unload, and so the closed door had been blown open by cannon. The Japanese, again very sensibly, decided that if they could not lead their own lives, they would transform themselves into the likeness of foreign devils, and give the West as much intercourse as it desired, and even more.

There is an old story about a magician's servant who stole his master's wand, and succeeded in summoning up an obsequious demon whom he ordered, as a first experiment, to fetch some water. But he

found it a less easy matter to stop the demon once he was started off, and bucket after bucket was emptied at an incredible rate into the room, until the whole place was flooded.

In the seventies, however, no one would have dreamed that this story could in any way symbolize the relations of Japan with the West. The Japanese were a charming discovery, quaint and picturesque little people who lived in a topsy-turvy sort of world and made pretty, fragile things that were a pleasing contrast to the products of Victorian England. They were, besides, more than willing to supply these things, in unlimited quantity, for cash down.

It was true that the Japanese had, for centuries, been a people of exquisite taste. But they had also become a people with the keenest possible eye for the main chance. They had not the least intention of stripping their country of its choicest works of art for the benefit of barbarians. They had sized up these barbarians shrewdly, as being possessed of just enough sense to appreciate the beauty of their art in general, but not enough to discriminate between its best and its second-rate products. Even connoisseurs knew practically nothing as yet of the great classical masters, the strength of Sessiu, the fire of Motonobu, the swiftness of Keion. To them Japanese art had culminated in the colour prints of the Ukiyoye school, beautiful in themselves, but, to a Japanese, no more than popular work of a late and rather decadent period. This perhaps inspired the cunning islanders with the idea that their Western customers would not know how to distinguish between one Japanese product and another. Once they knew a thing was Japanese, they would take its artistic merits on faith.

One of the first lessons that Japan had learnt from the West was that the mass production of plausible shoddy pays more than faithful craftsmanship ex-

pended on only a few things. The Chinese had not yet Westernized themselves to this extent—cheap willow-pattern ware was the product of European factories—but the Japanese soon acquired the faculty of turning out vast quantities of cheap and perishable goods, some of which found their way into every English drawing-room with the least pretensions to smartness. The best that can be said of these bamboo stands and tables and screens, of those ubiquitous paper fans, is that most of them have long ago fallen to pieces and gone to the rubbish heap. No doubt a certain number of really beautiful things were acquired, particularly in the early stages of the movement, but one of the chief effects of the Japanese influences was to substitute a new flimsiness for the old solidity.

It is probable that the change would have come about, even without Japanese help. The light and frivolous spirit of the time was entirely favourable to the multiplication of "arty" gimcracks all over the house. The excellent little manuals of household decoration, to which we have already referred, have no criticism to offer against the products of this new tendency. They are rather inclined to welcome any conscious striving for grace and beauty, after the dreadful ugliness against which it was a reaction. Can they be blamed for taking the æsthetic movement at its own valuation, and not perceiving how easy it would be to substitute for self-assertive ugliness, an imitative and shoddy prettiness, that, from the truly æsthetic standpoint, offered even less hope of salvation, but which might suit the jerry-builders of furniture very well indeed?

It is tragic that it should have been so, when one reflects how much real striving there was after the light of beauty. Even such small and forgotten manuals as those to which we have referred, or Eastlake's more ambitious *Principles of Household*

Taste—books that can be read by anyone now with pleasure and profit—show how understanding was the desire for beautiful surroundings, at any rate among certain individuals. The forlorn hope of William Morris to revive the arts and crafts of an idealized Gothic in the midst of a Machine age is among the most heroic episodes in the war of the divine spirit in Man for liberation. But mechanical and mass-production, reinforced by an almost universal valuation of cheapness above beauty, was too strong for æsthetes and muses combined. Heaviness may endure for a night, but shoddy cometh in the morning.

CHAPTER V

WHISTLER *V.* RUSKIN

The æsthetes, with all their extravagances and affectations, had this to be said for them—they were trying to bring art into the daily life of their time. But art itself was beginning more and more, as the century drew towards a close, to shun contact with the world and retire into its own technique.

This new æsthetic of art for art's sake has so thoroughly captured the mind of our own age that it is difficult for us to be quite fair to the Victorian stalwarts who fought against it. In their view the function of the artist was to give outward and visible form to the spirit of his time. That at least was the opinion of John Ruskin, who, by the beginning of the seventies, had become something like a dictator in the field of art-criticism. The history of the rise and fall of Venice was, according to his masterpiece of prose, recorded faithfully in her stones. Such a conception of art was eminently suited to the temper of the Victorian Age. It was common ground to artist and Philistine. Both would have agreed that so far as art could be tolerated at all, it ought to be elevating. Beauty of expression was no excuse if the thing expressed was not good but evil. And of that good and that evil it was not for the connoisseur or the technician to judge, but for the men and women for whose benefit works of art are produced. It is in the dining-room and not in the kitchen that the quality of a meal is determined.

That the taste of the elder Victorians in æsthetics was often grossly at fault is common ground to us

all. But perhaps we are hasty in condemning their philosophy on the strength of their practice. The fact is that the morality of the mid-nineteenth century rested on very insecure foundations. It might even be described as essentially immoral in that it aimed at preserving an outward appearance of respectability, instead of going to the root of the matter and creating a new heart and a right spirit within. It is one thing to say that beauty is truth, truth goodness—three in one and one in three—it is quite another to say that art shall be the expression and the artist the slave of a bogus morality. Thus when the Dean of St. Paul's refused to allow Alfred Stevens to put the equestrian statue over Wellington's monument, on the ground that a horse could not be tolerated in a church, he was wickedly impoverishing God's House for the sake of his own blasphemous caprice. When Ruskin set himself up to judge and condemn every master, from Michelangelo to Whistler, whose merits he had not the patience or humility to discover, he was coming dangerously near to committing unforgivable sin. The fault with these moralists was that they were not moral enough.

One thing always brought up against the Victorians is the importance they attached to the subjects of their pictures. They dearly loved a picture with a story. They were by no means unique in this preference, since many, perhaps the majority, of the world's greatest masterpieces are pictures with stories. There are, for instance, Velasquez' *Surrender of Breda*, Leonardo's *Last Supper*, and that glorious *Crucifixion* of Tintoretto, in the Scuola of San Rocco, which embodies a loftier ideal of Christianity than any written treatise on theology. Among English artists, Hogarth, whom Whistler himself admired more than any other, was frankly and unashamedly a teller of stories on canvas. But the Victorians, with Ruskin at their head, were inclined to treat pictures

in practice, if not in theory, as if the plot, or story, were the only thing that counted. Moreover it had to be a plot with a moral tacked on from the outside and not implicit in the soul of the composition. That moral was more often than not one of the immoral respectabilities of Victorian convention.

Thus the Victorians, when they tried to tell stories of a sublime or religious nature, succeeded in being about as convincing as some disgruntled bachelor announcer commandeered to function in the children's hour as Uncle Heliogabalus. When Christ figures upon a Victorian stained-glass window, He might well be mistaken for Mr. Chesterton's "hell-instructed grocer in a chapel made of tin", who has somehow contrived to glue a plate on to the back of his head. When the Victorians try to depict some incident in history, it is the sort of history that small boys are expected to mug up in their textbooks, in which dummies in costume pose as unconvincingly as tailors' waxworks. The incidents are not felt—there is no soul to be torn out of these stories.

The Victorians had, however, made one branch of pictorial story-telling their own. It was a time of great illustrators, and it is probable that at some future day Victorian black and white illustrations will be more eagerly sought after by collectors than more ambitious contemporary efforts on canvas. Nearly every one of the great artists of the sixties turned his hand, with success, to this humbler form of art, and the old Victorian magazines—*Good Words*, *The Quiver*, *Once a Week*, *The Churchman's Family Magazine*, and others whose very names seem redolent of Philistine smugness, turn out, on perusal, to be veritable treasure-houses of the peculiarly English art that had been handed on from the days of Rowlandson and Gillray without any breach of continuity.

Why this story-telling faculty was so brilliantly displayed on paper and so poorly on canvas is not

easy to say. There is, of course, Frith, though it is hardly safe nowadays to mention his work without some sort of a sneer. To be seen looking at his *Derby Day*, which, to judge by the crowds of beholders, is about the most popular picture in the National Gallery, is almost to stamp oneself as an outsider. And yet if—as all the critics assure us—this sort of thing is not art, it must be something else almost equally desirable. For surely we can get as deeply into the life, and even the soul, of that age, by studying this picture, or Frith's other one of Paddington Station, as we can by any other means at present available to us.

In the seventies, the great illustrators were still at work, and a new master of the coloured page rose to fame in Caldecott. *Punch* was fortunate enough to number among his staff perhaps the three greatest exclusively black and white artists of their time, Charles Keene, with his matchless power of hitting off the exact shade of an expression—a strangely un-Victorian figure in his austere avoidance of any sort of prettiness, Du Maurier, the social historian of an age of transition, Tenniel, as representative a Victorian as Tennyson or Watts or Gladstone, with his high seriousness of purpose and consciousness of his mission to immortalize the life and adventures, week by week, of a noble and puissant nation.

Apart from the illustrators, it can hardly be said that British art had succeeded in realizing much more than—what was after all the supreme ideal of the Victorians—a dignified respectability. It is true that the leaders of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood continued to turn out excellent work, embodying their view that artistic genius consisted in an infinite capacity for taking pains. But their standard-bearer, Millais, had long since sold whatever he had possessed of soul for a place in the sunshine of academic popularity—and few are the lodging-house parlours with-

out their *Bubbles* or *Black Brunswicker*—and the Pre-Raphaelites had ceased to be a dynamic influence. Their movement belonged, essentially, to the mid-century romanticism that was now visibly on the wane, though the advent of Burne-Jones, with his anæmic and almost sexless purity, galvanized it into some semblance of a second birth.

On the whole, John Bull felt that he had as much reason to be satisfied with his art, at the beginning of the seventies, as he was with his trade and his literature and his progress generally. It was, as we have indicated, respectable, reasonably competent, and all the better from having no element of unhealthy excitement about it. That sort of thing could be left to the red fool fury, or impressionist *flair*, of the Seine, though, to do it justice, the Paris Salon displayed as inquisitorial a zeal in the suppression of disturbing novelty as the English Academy—it was only by the intervention of Napoleon III that Manet and his fellow innovators got their canvases hung in the famous Salon of the Rejected.

If we could take an excursion into the past, and visit one of the Royal Academy exhibitions of the seventies, we should probably find the experience depressing. We should pass from landscape to landscape, each one heavier and duller than the last, each with the same predominance of browns and mustards, most of them soberly autumnal. We should look out upon oily and sullen seas, which seem as if they had never known the innumerable laughter of sunlight on waves. We should glance at story pictures—but no more than glance, for they are mostly either of a rather obvious pathos, or of a slightly ponderous whimsicality. And there would be classical pictures, coldly unexceptionable, or affording a decent excuse for studying modern young ladies in a state, not of nudity, but stark nakedness. There might be one or two exceptions—some truly

Apollonian creation of Leighton's, some charming pink and white decorative composition by Albert Moore, some noble portrait by Watts—but these would only serve to emphasize the tameness of the majority.

But then, we might reflect, the show was not arranged for casual visitors pitchforked backwards out of the future. If we could listen to the conversation of the frock-coated and bustle-encumbered crowd that drifted past us, we should realize that most of them were thoroughly and even aggressively satisfied with things as they were. It was curious, in an age that prided itself on its material progress, that on the spiritual and artistic side of life there should have been so deep-rooted a fear of disturbing the *status quo*. The fury aroused against the æsthetes of the seventies was essentially the same as that which had not yet subsided against evolutionists and ritualists. There was an almost religious fervour about the way in which *Punch* contrived to pillory any artist, poet or critic whom he suspected of advanced tendencies. Among his victims were the "swine-born" Swinburne, Walter Pater, Burne-Jones—"the still unburnt Jones, the Burne to which no traveller returns", Watts, and Whistler—not to speak of Wagner.

When an army is fighting a defensive battle, there is often some vital point or position that acquires a symbolic importance quite out of proportion to its real value, so that it becomes a matter of vital honour to defend it at all costs. Such were Ypres and Verdun for the Allies in the last war. Such was the infallibility of the first chapter of Genesis, for the clergymen who opposed Darwin. And such, for the conservative die-hards of art, was the authority of the great John Ruskin, now no longer a heretic, but a Slade Professor, and pillar of an orthodoxy that he himself had created.

He was the oddest figure that had ever been selected for such a rôle, for in spite of the intense seriousness with which he took himself and induced others to take him, he was more incurably eccentric than any other of the great Victorian individualists. He was, besides, the evangelist of a social gospel that was anything but orthodox. Between 1866 and 1875, he was passing through a crisis that threatened to unseat his reason, and certainly did not tend to broaden his outlook or soften his prejudices. Not satisfied with a marriage that had never been consummated and had finally been annulled, he, now well on in middle age, must needs fall in love with an adoring girl child—just as the future Archbishop Benson had done, with happier results. When his mistress, for so Ruskin, in the Dantesque sense, characterized her, arrived at an age when Ruskin could propose marriage, he found that he had reckoned without the young lady's mother, herself an attractive woman some years his junior, and—for whatever reason—inclined to be bitterly resentful of this mature wooing. Delays were imposed, and then the tragedy deepened, for the girl, whose nervously unstable temperament had been subjected to intolerable strain, developed a tendency to religious mania. Ruskin found a more formidable rival than any mother could be in the Low Church Lord. He found himself, for all his lofty idealism and Biblical diction, a heathen man and a publican in his Rosie's eyes. How could she cease loving him? And yet—how could she marry him? The poor girl's mind was obviously torn with a conflict between admiration for her lover's personality and genius, and the inner consciousness that, as a lover, he could never suffice for her. The conflict proved insoluble. First the mind and then the body collapsed. There is a story—though on doubtful authority—that before she died she refused to see Ruskin unless he would perjure himself to the

extent of declaring that he loved God more than her, which he, in his agony, refused to do. True or not, it is eminently characteristic of the relations between this tragic pair.

Ruskin entertained and even, with his naïve egoism, published to the world fears for his sanity. But not for a season were these fears destined to be realized. He addressed himself manfully to his work with such a fervour as must have inspired the Hebrew prophet when God had taken away the desire of his eyes with a stroke. In the position of unquestioned eminence that he now occupied, he had full scope alike for his genius and his eccentricities. He started his undergraduate admirers working as navvies on a road, that never served any more useful purpose than that of providing a certain amount of healthy exercise for the Elect, and agreeable chaff for the Philistines. He made the names of the Italian primitives familiar for the first time in Oxford Halls. He performed a priceless service for Venice and the world by unearthing the genius of Carpaccio. But what lay nearest to his heart was his ideal of a new social order to succeed the capitalist individualism that the vast majority of the class from which he had sprung found so good. He tried to form a society of enthusiasts devoted to the realization of his ideals—its guiding principle being obedience, obedience to John Ruskin. For years he expounded the principles of this society in a series of monthly letters bearing the cryptic title *Fors Clavigera*, but which would have been better named *The Book of the Prophet John*. Here he wrote, with glorious unrestraint, exactly as the spirit moved him, laying his lawless axe to the very roots of society. Society applauded, and thought what a charming creature Mr. Ruskin was.

But there was one sphere in which Ruskin's power was to be felt and known. As an art critic his authority was unquestioned, and like that of other

autocrats, it tended to degenerate into irresponsible tyranny. His condemnation had the effect of an artistic death sentence. As a rhyme of the time put it:

I paints and paints,
Hears no complaints,
And sells before I'm dry,
But savage Ruskin
Sticks his tusk in,
And nobody will buy.

That tusk was inserted once too often. For there had arisen another prophet, who was called James, and who testified to things done across the narrow seas that were hidden from John.

For while English art continued complacently insular, another French Revolution was being accomplished in the salons. The cry was that of the dying Goethe, that of Turner, Ruskin's adored master, in his last phase, for light. And wonderful things had been discovered about light—how if you dabbed on primary colours in patches instead of mixing them on the palette, you could make the canvas glow and shimmer as never before; how the same haystack might become a different haystack as the light changed from hour to hour; how the painter must always be striving to render what the eye sees and not what the brain knows. There was an American artist—he would have been an American officer if he could have passed his examinations—who had studied in Paris and thrown himself into these new developments with an enthusiasm as great as that which had inspired the Pre-Raphaelite brethren. Not being too favourably received in Paris, he had come to testify in England to the faith that was in him.

Anyone less like the conventional idea of a prophet—anyone, in fact, more calculated to irritate and grieve Ruskin—than this James Whistler, it would

have been difficult to imagine. Like Disraeli, he got himself up with an eyeglass and a drawl, in the part of an English gentleman, as that part is sometimes romanticized by those who are not English. He was a Disraeli with something of the astringency of a Swift. And to this he added a quality of his own that was peculiarly American, for he was one of the greatest masters that ever lived of the art of advertisement. He was determined to get not only his pose, but his art, and the principles it embodied, across the footlights.

"Ha, ha!" he had once exclaimed, focussing his eyeglass on some picture, "this man knows!"

That reveals his attitude of mind. He himself *knew*, not from theory, but because he had toiled and slaved after his knowledge—he knew no more than he had achieved. For those who, having achieved little or nothing, dared to lecture and disparage him who had borne the burden and heat of creation, he had a holy and consuming hatred. Do I not hate them, O creative beauty, that hate thee!

To hate was to attack, and with a deadliness of verbal sword-play worthy of Voltaire. One lightning thrust, and the fight was over. A highly respected critic had once pointed out that a symphony in white contained a brown dress and a blue ribbon. "*Bon dieu*," retorted Whistler, ". . . does he then, in his astounding consequence, believe that a symphony in F contains no other note, but shall be a continued repetition of F F F? . . . Fool!" That was Whistler's way with his critics, and it was too much to expect that he would be suffered gladly. Soon all the bravos of the press were thrusting together at this lonely Cyrano.

But his wit and the sheer merit of his work kept them all at bay until he crossed the path of Ruskin. The collision was sooner or later inevitable. If it had only been that a solemn giant was trying to

crush some bright and venomous insect—as to all outward appearances it was—the incident would have been trivial. Its real significance lay in the conflict between two gospels. For the prophet James was as much in earnest as the prophet John, and, if he were proved right, then was Ruskin, the art critic, one of those trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.

For to Ruskin art was the visible expression of a people's soul. But to Whistler she was apart, "selfishly occupied with her own perfection only—having no desire to teach", still less to do good. The less the people had to say about her, the better. The artist had no mission to help or ennoble his kind; he was no more than a specialist in a certain technique, and, as such, only amenable to the judgment of his peers. A mere literary interloper, like Ruskin, could no more judge of a picture than—to take an illustration from our own day—a person ignorant of the mathematics could check the conclusions of Einstein.

Thus, by Whistler's account, had the Muse earned her charter of freedom. But at what a price! For a world abandoning itself to headlong materialism, art had no message of salvation. Mankind might go to the devil in its own way, provided it allowed the artist to solve his technical problems in *his* own way. The attitude of the new æsthetic evangelist to the modern world was that of the early Christians to Roman civilization—they had no interest in its fortunes or preservation. Their kingdom was not of this world.

Whether such a faith was the logical outcome of the new impressionism is—to say the least of it—disputable. But no doubt the tendency of the impressionists was to concentrate on the purely technical aspects of art. In Whistler this tendency was carried to the point of libelling his own genius. Thus his superb portrait of his mother is, by his

own account, a mere arrangement in grey and black. It *was* this, among other things of infinitely greater importance. "But what", asked Whistler scornfully, "can or ought the public to care about the identity of the portrait?"

When the battle was joined between the prophets of the old and the new dispensations, the *casus belli* bore little relation to the real issue at stake. Ruskin, in his insularity, knew little and cared less about the latest Parisian developments. Manet and Degas, Monet and Renoir, might as well have been painting houses as far as he was concerned. When Whistler began to reveal hitherto unperceived marvels of light on the banks of the Thames, transforming even London fog into a thing of wonder and beauty, Ruskin could not understand what he was about; the whole thing seemed to him sheer bluff and impertinence. And as if the gods had determined, in Greek fashion, to punish him for his presumption, he assailed Whistler in almost the same terms that the Philistines of an earlier day had applied to Turner. He was flinging a pot of paint in the public's face. Restraint was not Ruskin's strong suit, and his righteous indignation led him to fling about such epithets as "ill-educated conceit", "wilful imposture", "cockney impudence", and "coxcomb". This was part of one of the monthly pronouncements in *Fors Clavigera*.

It seemed this time as if the butterfly had really been crushed. The sale of Whistler's pictures, on which his livelihood depended, fell off. But in this almost desperate situation, he determined upon a *coup* of magnificent audacity. He would sue the great man in the law courts for libel. To all appearance, it was an act of insane pique. Ruskin had the whole authority of those who counted in the world of English art to back his own. It was not likely that a London jury would appreciate the merits of a

nocturne in black and gold more keenly than the author of *Modern Painters*. And the expense, even of a successful action, would be ruinous to Whistler.

But no one was more capable of appreciating the ultimate effects of a master-stroke of publicity. His opponent was prevented, by ill health, from appearing in person, but his cause was supported by a formidable company of witnesses, including Frith and Burne-Jones, and the Attorney-General had been briefed on his behalf. So much the better for Whistler's purpose.

The great lawyer, completely out of his depth, tried to cross-examine Whistler on the subject of his paintings. The artist, with deadly courtesy, succeeded not only in repulsing but annihilating him.

"The labour of two days, then, is that for which you ask two hundred guineas?"

"No," came the reply, "I ask it for the knowledge of a lifetime."

After this it was merely slaying a corpse when, in reply to,

"Do you think now that you could make *me* see the beauty of that picture?"

Whistler, after gravely scrutinizing first the picture and then the devoted Philistine before him, drawled out his verdict:

"No! Do you know it would be as hopeless as for the musician to pour his notes into the ears of a deaf man."

That cross-examination had achieved Whistler's purpose. After that it did not matter that the jury awarded the contemptuous verdict of a farthing damages—Whistler flaunted the farthing on his watch-chain. It did not even matter that as the result of the proceedings he was declared bankrupt. He dominated his assembled creditors with as easy a grace as he had disposed of the Attorney-General, and then he went to Venice, and began to retrieve

his fortunes with a series of matchless etchings. He was now the most-talked-of artist in England, and he saw to it that people were kept talking. The time was to come when no critic would dare accord him anything but the honours of a Master.

An even more important result of the trial was that the authority of John Ruskin, and all that he stood for, was shattered beyond recovery. Henceforth it was the gospel of James, and not that of John, that was in the ascendant. The idea of art as something apart from, and even in opposition to, the tendencies of modern civilization, was steadily gaining ground. But it might prove that by cutting itself loose from art, as well as religion, civilization was in danger of losing its own soul.

CHAPTER VI

SCIENCE AS RELIGION

To deny that every day and in every way materi civilization was getting better and better, or at any rate fatter and fatter, would hardly have occurred to any ordinary person in the seventies. And yet—was everything so well as it seemed? What of the foundations? What of the informing spirit? It was disquieting that art should be showing a tendency to withdraw itself from life. But the majority of practical men probably thought, if they did not say, that life could get on well enough, at a pinch, without art. It was more disquieting that the certainties of religion should be called in question. But there was at least one rock upon which sensible men could build, and that rock was science.

It was, after all, science that had made modern progress what it was. Science—to use a phrase entirely appropriate in a commercial age—delivered the goods. She increased, visibly, measurably, and continuously, man's powers over the dead matter and blind energy of his environment. There was no nonsense about science. She did not draw cheques to be cashed post-mortem by the Bank of Heaven. She did not prescribe forms of prayer to attract depressions or break up anti-cyclones. She was the good fairy, whose gifts, in one brief century, had revolutionized human life. In an age of universal questioning her truth stood above question, her laws held good throughout the whole of infinite space.

Since the publication of that epoch-making book, Darwin's *Origin of Species*, science had displayed every

sign of becoming not only a mode of knowledge, but a religion—the way, the truth and the life of the future. The attempt of the fundamentalist hierarchy to dictate to seekers after truth what precise sort of truth they were or were not to find, was followed by a counter-offensive of the triumphant scientists. Free thought, by a strange freak of language, became the label attached to a counter-orthodoxy, it being understood that thought was only free when it happened to flow in rationalistic channels. It became the fashion to look upon religion and science as if they were two rival faiths in perpetual conflict, an Ormuz of dry light contending with an Ahriman of priestly darkness. On neither side was a spirit of sweet reasonableness much *en evidence*. I have heard an old Victorian clergyman, the kindest and best of men, confess that it was a pity he had never had the opportunity for one good running kick at Darwin. On the other side we have that austere Radical Mr. John Morley of Blackburn and the *Fortnightly Review*, carefully spelling God with a small " g ", in the principle, as Mr. Justice Stephen surmised, that every little helps. Swinburne —an incongruous cavalier figure amid the grim ironsides who fought for the Unknowable—took advantage of the Œcumenical Council at Rome to shriek defiance at the priests and their God, and to sing,

> " Glory to Man in the highest ! for Man is the maker of things ! "

So far, the open conflict of science against religion was waged by an intelligentsia of latter-day Puritans. They were, in fact, more consistent Puritans than those of the Reformation, who had but exchanged the authority of Holy Church for that of Holy Scripture, and who forsook Leo of Rome to cling the closer to Jesus of Nazareth. But though they rejected the Victorian God, they had more than their share of Victorian respectability. Nothing would induce any

of them to admit to so shameful a designation as that of atheist. Huxley, in 1869, coined the convenient term Agnostic. "The difference between an agnostic and an atheist", as Professor Bury, a later freethinker, put it, "is that the atheist positively denies the existence of a personal God, the agnostic does not believe in it."[1] Which, of course, made all the difference in the world, or, at any rate, in that part of the world that owned Victoria as Queen.

There is a curious similarity in the appearance of these Victorian Rationalists. The forehead is usually of noble proportions in striking contrast with the lower part of the face, whose pinched appearance, especially when accentuated by whiskers, suggests that the emotional development has been sacrificed to that of the intellect. But a glance is enough to convince the most prejudiced beholder that the freedom of these men stopped short at thought, and did not extend to their righteous and sober, if not—in the formal sense—godly lives. They were, in fact, thoroughly worthy specimens of the middle-class Englishman.

A state of conflict between religion and science is equally injurious for both. It brought the repre-
entatives of science out of the study and laboratory
nto the market-place; it taught them the arts of the
hetorician and journalist. Charles Darwin, one of
e truest men of science that ever lived, refused to
ve part or lot in these controversies, and deplored
at they should have troubed the peaceful world of
ence. But Huxley—great biologist though he was
vas also a born fighter, and joyously assumed the
ce of Darwin's bulldog. The bulldog is a noble
nal—but hardly of the kind best fitted to typify
scientific temperament. Tyndall, Clifford, and
r Rationalists, were not behindhand in militancy.
result of conflict was inevitably to create a dogma

[1] *A History of Freedom of Thought*, p. 214.

became more and more uncompromising for
oses of propaganda, and finally become simple
gh to be proclaimed from soap-boxes in Hyde
k.

The effect was bad on the scientists themselves, for
atmosphere of conflict is fatal to that serene detach-
ent of view, that perfect readiness to follow the truth
wherever she leads, which is the first thing needful
or the scientist. Its effect was almost equally bad
upon the man in the street, for it made him see the
achievement and aims of science in an utterly fals
perspective.

To this man in the street, the controversy about
evolution assumed a wholly disproportionate import-
ance. It was like Free Trade or Parliamentary
Reform—something easy to understand and with a
strong emotional appeal. Mr. Darwin had said that
men were descended from monkeys—in one book of
the time, by a heavily sarcastic clergyman, we have a
picture of one of these supposed ancestors, with the
body of a monkey and the head and beard of a typical
man of the seventies. One hand, or paw, grasps a
bottle—presumably of strong liquor. Darwin ha
not only insulted God by taking the job of creati
off His hands, but also Man, by giving him an indef
itely great-grandfather called Jacko, which may
plain, if it does not justify, the desire of the g
man, to whom I have already referred, for a run
kick at Darwin.

This booming and pillorying of Darwin
a complete misunderstanding of that great
achievement. From a scientific point of vi
origin of *homo sapiens* is a side issue of no
importance. What Darwin had accomplish
veritable revolution in the science of biology
to his patient research and brilliant generali
classification of species had been placed
evolutionary basis—no biologist who fol

whether he chose to call himself rationalist or fund mentalist, could build on any other foundations tha those which Darwin had so well and truly laid.

The rumpus about Moses and monkeys had give the layman not only a distorted, but a partial view o scientific progress. Biology happened to be in the limelight, because it was possible to get an emotional kick out of it. But few people bothered about the equally important work that was being done in other fields of research, because abstruse and symbolically expressed calculations make poor reading. The day of the humble inventor, with little book-learning, but with a knowledge of machinery derived from practical experience of its handling, was waning to its close. The problems that now called for solution were those not of the workshop but the study. For every score of men who took sides for or against Darwin, scarcely one knew or cared about the wonderful work that was being done by men like Thomson (afterwards Lord Kelvin) and Clerk Maxwell in increasing Man's knowledge and control of the blind forces of nature. Even when life was enriched by such gifts as the submarine cable, the telephone, and the electric light, few of the beneficiaries had the least idea of the men and labour to which they were indebted. But the last thing these labourers would have wished was to emerge into the limelight. The conflict between religion and science might be waged in the field of biology—its echoes hardly penetrated to those of physical and mathematical science. Clerk Maxwell might elaborate Faraday's intuitions into formulæ—he would never have dreamed of being Faraday's, or anyone else's, bulldog.

. Meanwhile science was continuously effecting the transformation of life. It might be a question whether Man was being more or less affected by art as the years went by, but there could be no question that Man ,was every year becoming a more scientific

animal, or, at any rate, more dependent on the results of science. If we could put ourselves back even to mid-Victorian times, we should find daily life surprisingly crude and primitive, even among the rich and comfortable classes. This was especially the case in the now all-important matter of hygiene. The big bath was still a rare and sometimes a dangerous institution. It would probably be a large and luxurious addition to somebody's bedroom, into which the water oozed in some mysterious way from below. It drained off into the pipe from the nearest water closet, which was not invariably provided with a trap. What sweet influences percolated from the depths may be better imagined than described. I know of one instance where the occupant of such a room was in a state of chronic ill-health until the cause was at long last ascertained. It is not surprising that the cause of a good many deaths was summed up in the expressive word " drains ".

In the same house, the drawing-room became inexplicably and intolerably noisesome whenever the wind happened to be in a certain quarter. This was eventually found to be due to the fact that the " stink pipe " ran up the chimney stack, and that its effluvia were, under certain conditions, actually drawn down into the room.

Fresh air, particularly during the night, was a source of terror, and heroic efforts were made to keep it from human lungs. In the excellent series of household manuals to which I have already referred, the volume on the bedroom is written by one who proclaims herself to be an enthusiast for fresh air, but even she countenances the nocturnal sealing up of children, old people, and invalids. One bold device of hers for admitting air into the room, is that of boring a few holes with an awl into the door! Every sort of contrivance was in use for keeping any breath of untainted air from filtering between window-sashes, beneath

doors, or down chimneys, and for producing a morning frowst of Herculean potency.

If this was so even in the stately homes of England, how much worse must have been the conditions in which the poor had to pig it together! I would quote, [illegible] odland, [illegible] typhus [illegible] y trust the description of the parish priest, who appears, in this instance, to have been the most enlightened member of the community! "Men", he says, "build houses without wells and without drains; with open cesspools and with open drains; with the drains of one block of houses running under the open sinks of another block of houses, and sending their vapours through them; with closets in closest possible proximity to the houses, crowded and not cleaned for eighteen months at a time."[1]

And yet, next year, the local Board of Guardians rejected by one vote the proposition to appoint a sanitary inspector. For, as their chairman sapiently informed them, "there is no proof that disease is connected with stinks and smells. The London night men and cesspool cleaners are a very healthy race; their employment agrees with them. Again the cattle plague has not spared Lord Sydney and Lord Granville, where every precaution has doubtless been used, and I do not believe that the cholera would be kept off by any similar precautions."

But progress in such things was continuous, if not always rapid. The scientific spirit of the time had spread even to the politicians—Disraeli invented the slogan *Sanitas sanitatum, omnia sanitas*, and his Secretary, Assheton Cross, made a notable attempt to translate it into practice, particularly by his Artisans' Dwellings Act of 1875, which gave the opportunity for Joseph Chamberlain, as Mayor of Birmingham, to

[1] *Maidstone Journal*, 30th November 1865.

show what could be done by enlightened administration to transform Cobbett's "wens" into well-ordered and healthy cities in which men could have scope for living well.

Human life was being made progressively longer and safer, not only by public action, but by the giant strides that were being made in the healing art, and particularly by Lister's development of antiseptic surgery. The status of the doctor was greatly improved during Victoria's reign; he was no longer in danger of having it confounded with that of the old apothecary—which, by the way, had been the last word on the lips of the mortally stricken Wellington. But as late as the eighties occurred the trial of a certain Kentish rector, who, in addition to his ordinary duties to his flock, was in the habit of performing those of an unlicensed and unpaid general practitioner, and who finally succeeded, not by exhortation but prescription, in inducing one of them to join the angels. At the subsequent trial a sympathetic jury acquitted him, which was perhaps fortunate, as Mr. Justice Day made no secret of the severe line he would have been prepared to take.

Signs were already apparent that the discoveries of Faraday, and the work of Maxwell, Thomson, Herz, and others, in exploring the electro-magnetic field, were beginning to bear fruit. The Steam Age was beginning to merge into that of electricity. The telephone was invented in 1876, and in 1878 there was something like an incipient panic among the holders of gas shares, on account of the arrival of the electric light. This discovery seems to have created quite a sensation—to judge from the way it is exploited in *Punch*—though, as a matter of fact, it was quite a score of years before it made its way into anything like general use. At any rate it could still, in the middle of the nineties, account for the climax of the following description, in a school-boy's attempt at a novel, of

"a room vieing with, nay, surpassing in splendour, the most magnificent chamber in any palace in the world. Nothing met the eye but the glitter of gold and sparkle of diamonds, the costliest hangings, the loveliest tapestry, the most exquisitely panelled ceiling, and"—the author having evidently reserved the choicest item in this feast of typically ninetyish taste for the last—"the whole was lit by a magnificent electric light."[1]

"Others abide our question, thou art free,"

might, during the second half of Victoria's reign, have been spoken not of Shakespeare, but of science. She, at least, might claim to be making the world every day and in every way better and better. She affected life in manifold and often unsuspected ways, ever more and more intimately, and always she was the kind fairy, the miracle-working genie at his master's beck and call. It is true that some of the old ecclesiastical guard kept up a rear-guard action against her advance. There were husbands and even doctors who drew the line against making things too easy for woman in labour—a merciful Lord being supposed to have a sort of vested interest in their screams, and one remembers hearing old-fashioned people talking of the impious presumption of those who imagined they could defeat their Maker's plain intention by enabling men to fly like birds. But "the great social forces" of Gladstonian rhetoric were more and more obviously —except to Gladstone and a few fellow reactionaries— on the side of the scientists. The age was becoming more and more consciously scientific, and in fact, as Samuel Butler noted down, science was becoming daily more and more personified and defied. The time, he surmised, would come when it would be said that science had sent down his only begotten

[1] Abstracted, by kind permission of the author, from *I Never Sleep*, a hitherto unpublished romance.

son, Darwin or Huxley, that those who believe in him, etc.

This new religion of science was fast acquiring a body of dogmatic belief, though its apostles—not being skilled in such matters—never succeeded in boiling it down to a creed. Nothing was God—everything was that new, blessed word evolution. The universe was a common-sense and plain-sailing affair to those who refrained from pushing inquiry too far into ultimate truths. Space was emptiness that went on for ever. Time likewise went on, and had gone on, for ever. Within these ample confines the game of evolution was played, with a few very simple materials. You had matter made up of little, hard, indivisible pills called atoms, of some four-score-and-ten assorted kinds and weights. You had energy, with a strange property of always dissipating itself in space, so that the universe was busily engaged, and presumably always had been, in burning itself out. There was gravitation, which gave every atom a tiny but measurable pull on every other atom. Why, was not very clear, except that you had got to get the concern started somehow. Then life turned up at the appropriate moment, and though no scientist had so far succeeded in getting life into dead matter—except with the aid of an unsterilized receptacle—there was no doubt, among the faithful, that the feat had accomplished itself somehow in Archæan times, and that the ways and means of the transition would sooner or later be revealed. The rest was just a matter of trust in Darwin and belief in the power of future scientists to clear up whatever was as yet unexplained in the theory.

If space, time, gravitation, life, energy, and all the different kinds of atoms had ever done anything so irregular as to sing together, that song would most appropriately have been the war-time chorus of:

We're here, because we're here, because
We're here, because we're here!

A nonsense universe, this, if we are to think in terms of ultimate or absolute truth, but a very convenient and perhaps necessary provisional sketch of the universe, in the existing state of knowledge. Scientists are quite right to work on the basis of the facts they have discovered, and not those that they believe may be discovered some day. And if the facts, up to date, do not provide a basis for a coherent or self-explanatory universe, the scientists must put up with the best makeshift they can get, just as primitive astronomers conducted their researches in a universe with the sun in the middle, or the first geographers found out as much as they could about a flat earth. The only danger about the method is when the makeshift gets taken a little too seriously, and, consciously or subconsciously, the nonsense hardens into a dogma, which, unless a man accepts whole and undefiled, he cannot be sane. For scientific fiction, through an indispensable servant, is of all masters the most tyrannous.

All would have been well, if the scientists had accepted the full implications of Huxley's new word "Agnostic", and confessed, like Newton, that they were but as children gathering pebbles on the shore of a boundless ocean of knowledge. But what the agnosticism of the *fin de siècle* amounted to in practice, was more like the faith supposed to be that of Dr. Jowett:

> "Whatever there is to know I know it,
> And what I don't know isn't knowledge."

But the first lesson of evolution surely ought to have been how very dangerous it is for any generation to take its speculations on ultimate truth too seriously.

The deification of science prevented its worshippers from perceiving how perilously lopsided it had become. In all that concerned the knowledge and control of the outer world, its advance had been

sensational beyond precedent. In what concerned the knowledge and control of Man himself, there had been scarcely the semblance of progress. Indeed, the tendency was to reduce thought and personality to a mere specialized function of matter, and to treat Man as if he were no more than a specially complicated piece of machinery, with his thoughts and actions as rigidly predetermined as the course of a planet. The psychology of time was, for the most part, an indigestible re-hash of dead Panjandrum; sociology was the new fancy word for a long-winded paraphrase of each sociologist's individual or class prejudices. Science was, in fact, too busy transforming Man's environment to have any serious thought of adapting Man to that transformation. In fact, she hardly recognized his existence, except as a not specially significant part of his own environment. But if there was anything to be learnt from evolution at all, it was that a species which, for any reason, fails to adapt itself to environment, dies. Which would appear to mean that science was very swiftly and effectively arranging for the extinction of the human species. Not that anybody, in that time of prosperity and progress, would have regarded such a statement as anything but a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Science was lopsided in another way. So convinced were its adherents of the all-sufficiency of their provisional universe, that they were almost incapable of receiving any facts or evidence that were plainly incapable of fitting into it. In 1868, for example, three eminently trustworthy witnesses, two of them peers, testified to having seen Mr. D. D. Home float out of one window, 70 feet above the street, and in at another. The feat was actually repeated, and the incident is as well testified to as anything can conceivably be. Again Professor Crookes, one of the greatest scientists of the day, conducted a number of experiments with a strange being calling itself Katie

King, that appeared capable of materializing under certain conditions, and of whose genuineness the Professor convinced himself by the most searching tests. But these and a multitude of similar phenomena were either denied with contumely, or simply ignored. The open mind, supposed to be characteristic of the scientist, was almost invariably banged, barred and bolted in the face of such evidence. The rationalist entered a séance-room not to inquire but to expose, thus doing his bit for the inviolability of the neat and intelligible universe in which he chose to live. And, of course, there was plenty to expose, because these new phenomena, with which orthodox science refused to concern itself, became the special preserve of the fraud and charlatan, on the one hand, and, on the other, of uncritical enthusiasts, pathetically intent on the one object of reopening communication with their beloved dead, and as ready to be convinced of their existence as old Lady Tichborne of the identity of the Claimant with her lost son. Had the problem been approached with an honest determination to sift the true from the false and to follow the truth wherever it might have led, the conclusion might have emerged, not, perhaps, that the claims of the spiritualists were to be accepted at their face value, but that the universe was a far less simple affair than a mere working hypothesis would lead one to suppose, and that science, even towards the close of the nineteenth century, might be only scratching at the surface of reality.

We come back to the question—were the effects and tendencies of nineteenth-century science so unquestionably beneficent as almost everyone at the time assumed them to be? Merely to have asked such a question in the seventies would have been to invite doubts on one's seriousness or sanity—unless, indeed, one was championing the cause of that invincibly reactionary Potentate usually referred to as the Lord.

And yet, in 1872, there had been published a brilliantly witty satire on modern life, bearing the title of *Erewhon*, or Nowhere, and written by the Samuel Butler whom we have already met as a blasphemer of scientific orthodoxy, but whom no one had ever accused of serving the Lord. This "Enfant Terrible of Literature" argued, through the mouth of an Erewhonian professor, the possibility that mankind would eventually sink into a state of contented but abject slavery to its machines. But then no one took Erewhonian professors, or even Butler himself, very seriously.

There were—as we have already hinted—more ominous possibilities still. Did it really go without saying that mankind was capable of controlling the vast powers of which it had suddenly possessed itself? A distribution of Rolls-Royces to infants or bombs to the inmates of an asylum would not necessarily be attended with pleasant consequences.

CHAPTER VII

ORTHODOXY IN RETREAT

When the key-positions of Christianity were being assailed with ever-increasing violence, one might have expected that its adherents would have drawn together in defence of the common cause. But so little did the realities of the outer world penetrate to those courts in which one day was better than a thousand, that reverend gentlemen—once they had recovered from the first shock of Darwinism—were more excited about their own sectarian differences than concerned about the prospect of finding themselves like the frogs and mice in the fable, with the Agnostics in the part of the owls.

To the ecclesiastical specialist, squabbles about the precise circumstances in which it is lawful to burn tallow, and the right of the congregation to see what their priest is doing with his hands, are of momentous interest. What the Carpenter of Nazareth would have thought of them is another matter. It is, anyhow, largely with such squabbles that the ecclesiastical history of this time is taken up.

The great days and enthusiasms of the Oxford Movement were over, and the battle of High and Low had resolved itself into something resembling the stale-mate of trench warfare, enlivened by perpetual raids. Low had had a distinct advantage in the large-scale operations that had ended with the secession of first Newman and then Manning to Rome, but it was evident that all the massed forces of Protestantism would not be able to drive High from the field. Despite hair-raising warnings of a

new Popish plot, of pitiful prisoners in convents, of wives and daughters corrupted wholesale by Don Juans in strange vestments, despite also the ridicule and contempt with which Ritualistic practices were assailed in the most influential section of the press, the Ritualists not only remained firmly entrenched in their parishes, but actually began to gain ground. It soon became apparent that in a body like the Church of England, with its tangle of prescriptive rights and its intense parochial individualism, it was perfectly impossible to enforce any centralized discipline over a few determined sectarians, with a *flair* for litigation, and martyrdom as a trump card to be played when litigation went the wrong way.

The comic muse of Gilbert and Sullivan was prohibited from treading on holy ground, otherwise they might have composed an even funnier sequel to *Trial by Jury*, founded on some of the actual cases in the course of which grave divines vindicated their Christian liberties. One of the points to be thrashed out would have been the right of a clergyman to brighten up his service by the use of a stuffed dove. There was Father Arthur Tooth, who having successfully forced the secular arm to put him into jail, and having been ejected thence at the urgent request of his ecclesiastical opponents, got back into the church, out of which he had been locked, by the window, conducted a forbidden service, and subsequently, by an absurd technical quibble, turned the tables on the judge who had originally committed him for contempt, and had the whole proceedings against him declared null and void.[1] And only Gilbert could have done justice to the clergyman who refused to administer the Sacrament to a member of his flock, unless he would sit down and write a "calm letter" stating his belief—which, by the way, he had never denied—in the Devil.[2]

[1] *A History of Modern England*, by H. Paul, Vol. IV, pp. 353–4.
[2] *Ib.*, Vol. III, pp. 422–3.

Only two or three clergymen actually succeeded in attaining jail; the mere threat of such a scandal was enough to blunt the edge of coercion. The spirit of uncompromising realism, that was gradually ousting the old Liberal idealism from every department of civilized life, was particularly *en evidence* among the Ritualists—there was, indeed, some resemblance between their tactics, and those of Parnell's militant nationalism. The essence of both was to seize every possible advantage and exploit it by any means. These tactics, when employed by the Ritualist clergy, if not very obviously Christian, were at least justified by success. Every attempt to enforce Protestant standards broke down hopelessly. Even when a Bill was passed, in 1874, with the express object of putting down Ritualistic practices, it merely succeeded in multiplying lawsuits, without achieving any part of its object.

But we shall be doing less than justice to the ministers of Christianity, if we fix our attention only on the militant side of their activities. An ecclesiastic is after all a practical worker, who is only incidentally concerned with theory. He has as hard a daily job as most men, and it is by the way he gets through that job that his value to society will be determined. Had the Ritualists been merely concerned with litigation and controversy, they would never have succeeded, as they eventually did, in becoming the most powerful party in the Church. But they devoted more attention to the technique of their calling than their opponents, and they were masters of a considerably more scientific practical psychology. They were equally successful in satisfying the emotional requirements of rich and fashionable congregations, like that of All Saints', Clifton, and not only the emotional, but also the bodily needs, of desperately poor parishes like St. Peter's, London Docks, whose vicar was the Reverend Charles Fuge Lowder.

This gentleman's services were an occasion of peculiar scandal to his Evangelical opponents, who brawled and blasphemed with such pious zeal that the Bishop had, at one time, to order the church to be closed. But then the cholera came to the parish, and such was Father Lowder's work that from that time forth the docker congregation furnished a sufficiently rough house to keep the hottest gospeller quiet during service time.

It was from such shining examples of Christian service that the High Church derived the strength that enabled it to survive the prejudice, now of three centuries' standing, against anything that savoured of "Popery". The headquarters of Ritualism was at St. Alban's, Holborn, where the service was described by Lord Shaftesbury as resembling that of Jupiter and Juno, and whose officiating priest was a Mr. Mackonochie, whose life was one long series of litigations. But among the curates was Father Stanton, one of those men who seem born to attract love, and who added to the gifts of a social worker the spiritual force of a saint. Fathers Lowder and Stanton were but outstanding examples of a type of which the ascetic discipline of the extreme High Church was prolific. There was also another type of Ritualist whose standpoint—or temperament—was less that of the saint than of the technician, and whose austere zest in the sectarian game was uninformed by any fire of spiritual enthusiasm or warmth of charity. Such a man was often worth his weight in gold when it was a question of skilled team work, but he afforded whatever justification existed for the Protestant caricature of the tight-lipped and unctimonious [1] Machiavellian who was plotting to wean the country from the simple Evangelical faith of Christ crucified.

[1] A word, I believe, for which the English language is indebted to Father Ronald Knox.

This faith was by no means a spent force, even as late as the seventies. The technique of salvation by violent doses of spiritual excitement was carried a step further by Messrs. Sankey and Moody, who were pioneers of that intensive mass suggestion that was destined to such prodigious exploitation in their native America. Even more remarkable was that severely disciplined and sternly Evangelical organization founded by William Booth to wage war on the Devil, and christened, in 1880, the Salvation Army.

We have to distinguish between two aspects of organized Christianity. For the intellectual and spiritual problems of the time, it was becoming more and more palpably incompetent to provide a solution. Hardly one of the recognized leaders [1] of contemporary thought could by the remotest stretch of imagination have been described as a hundred-per-cent Christian of any recognized denomination. The rival sects furiously raged together in a dream world of their own, with which enlightened thinkers did not concern themselves. But the Churches, like frogs, displayed a wonderful capacity of normal functioning after the greater part of their brains had been scooped out. The clergy were incomparably more efficient workers than a hundred, or even fifty years before. The success of "Soapy Sam" Wilberforce and other reforming bishops in organizing their dioceses had set up a new and higher standard of clerical duty. The old, port-drinking *bon viveurs*, who had, through family influence, been appointed to many a fat living as a means of drawing an easy income for a minimum of work, had almost died out. I doubt if any old gentleman alive to-day could truthfully parallel a confidence made to me by one in the dawn of this century—that the first time he

[1] Newman is, of course, the most conspicuous exception. Gladstone, as a thinker, is hardly to be taken seriously, still less Manning.

had ever been the worse for liquor was when, on the way home after dining with the Vicar, he had gone to sleep in his pony cart and ended up, cart and all, in a ditch. The sectarian struggle for survival had at least one good effect—that neither side had any use for the Reverend amateur.

But no amount of zeal and conscientious parish work could compensate for what was becoming more and more plainly the intellectual bankruptcy of the Churches. The vital need of the age was for a new spiritual orientation, an adaptation of the human spirit to the revolutionized circumstances of a machine age. But the seeker for truth was either commanded to put his intellect into fetters and be as happy as he could with emotional dope, or else to accept the literal infallibility of a criticism-riddled Bible and a myth of divine vindictiveness and vicarious sacrifice that ran directly counter to all his notions of justice and credibility.

Was there no alternative between such reversion to the myths of an unscientific age, and an advance to the arid wastes of a Rationalism by which Man was reduced to a transitory and soulless automaton in that enormous, but equally transitory automatic accident called the universe? The austere and unemotional Puritans who championed their new religion of science found this prospect as much to their liking as the Esquimau doubtless finds the prospect of his icy mountains, but to mortals of less stern composition, the idea of being deprived of God, free-will, and immortality without any compensation except that of more accurate text-books and bigger and better machines, was anything but exhilarating. A French professor, Auguste Comte, had tried, in his logical French way, to set up a religion of humanity that should retain all the emotional satisfactions of a superseded God-worship; but though this Positivism, as it was called, had its

propagandists in England, including so notable a man of letters as Frederic Harrison, it never seemed able to come alive. It might be logical to substitute Our Humanity which art on Earth for Our Father which art in Heaven, but it did not somehow seem the real thing. You may turn on the tap of religious emotion, but unless there is some force to drive the water along the pipes, you will get nothing but a few chokes and gurgles—and the rest silence.

But to some less logical English minds, it did not seem altogether hopeless to make the best of both worlds, and to retain some sort of a God, who might fit in equally well with the Christian and the Agnostic scheme of things. A divine Candidate for the post had been in existence for quite a century and a half, though His claims, during the nineteenth century, had been overshadowed by those of that celestial King Stork, whom pious Evangelicals feared as the Lord. His affable and discreet rival with whom even Voltaire had been on bowing terms, I ventured in *The Victorian Tragedy*[1] to designate as the Deity. This God, or Power, or Principle, indulged in none of the violent and wrathful activities of the Lord. He was content to let the Universe run itself, so far as it was able. Only, in order that it might run smoothly and in the right direction, He imparted to it just the necessary minimum of tilt or bias. His business was to make everything work out right in the long run—rather like a dramatist who lets his characters develop freely on their own lines, but guides them all the time to a happy ending.

It was just there that the danger of the Deity cult lay. He could be relied upon by Man to do what it was Man's supreme duty to do for himself. The necessity for a spiritual revolution to match the revolution in Man's outward circumstances could be safely burked, because "*somehow*", as Tennyson

[1] In the U.S.A., *Those Earnest Victorians.*

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expressed it, "good will be the final goal of ill". The ship may be drifting towards the rocks, but the Captain is somewhere up above, and may be trusted to get her safely somehow to some sort of a port. That is what Tennyson would have called faintly trusting the larger hope.

The prestige of the Lord had been more and more discredited ever since His unfortunate encounter with Darwin, and it was almost inevitable under the circumstances that some attempt should be made to resuscitate the Deity. Indeed He hardly needed resuscitating, for some of the greatest Victorians might have been claimed as His devotees—Tennyson, for instance, Ruskin, and perhaps Browning. Carlyle was essentially a Deity-worshipper, only his Calvinist upbringing had the effect of imparting to his Power or Principle informing the Universe some of the most unaimiable qualities of the Lord.

Evolution naturally offered great opportunities for a Deity to guide or supervise the process—and even to bridge over awkward gaps. Mr. Bernard Shaw actually succeeded in making his Deity create or evolve Himself out of nothing.

During the seventies the most ambitious attempt to bring the Deity abreast of the time was that of Matthew Arnold, who had little if any interest in the evolution controversy. Arnold was the son of an intensely moralizing clerical head master, and though he conceived it his life's mission to be an apostle of culture, he was perfectly incapable of regarding art or literature from any other standpoint than that of a very earnest pedagogue conducting the Sunday morning service in the School chapel. Shelley's genius is waved away in a sentence; his peccadilloes occupy a whole essay. Keats is summoned to the head master's study, where his letters to Miss Brawne are opened and read . . . most distressing . . . and such a promising boy! Byron

too, brilliant—granted—but slovenly; it is more in sorrow than in anger that we have to write on his report, "Could not manage himself, could not guide his ways aright . . . was all astray . . . no light . . . did not see the slow and laborious way upward . . . had not the patience, knowledge, self-discipline, virtue . . ." one cannot rub such lessons in too hard!

It was not enough for Arnold to be a pedagogue. The Muse herself had got to put on cap and gown, and take her mission seriously. Poetry—presumably *without* a hey and a ho and a hey nonny no—was defined as a criticism of life. Whether or not that was the Muse's attitude towards life, it was certainly Arnold's. He was perpetually criticizing, but he seemed powerless to construct. He was best when he was dwelling with a maliceful suavity, not wholly unlike that of a "catty" woman, on the foibles and crudities of the British Philistine. Culture was the remedy he had to offer, but when you come to inquire in what culture consisted, it did not appear to amount to anything more definite than just being cultured.

It was inevitable that with his clerical-pedagogical bias, Arnold should have applied himself to the reform of religion; it was no less inevitable that he should have had resource to a God so eminently in harmony with his own temperament as the urbane and rather indefinite Deity. So earnest a censor of morals would naturally want his Deity to resemble himself as much as possible. Accordingly Arnold's God is defined as a power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness. In other words, He is somebody or something, according to choice, that gives the human heart an imperceptible but sufficient tilt in the right direction. How He, or It, goes about this useful task is nowhere very clearly indicated.

Under these auspices it is quite possible, Arnold

thinks, to combine Christianity with culture. The supernatural element—that is to say, anything inconsistent with the view of nature fashionable among Victorian scientists—is discreetly barred by Arnold's own dogma that miracles do not happen. And Christ, if not exactly a Saviour, was a very sweet and reasonable young man. If you only look at it in the right way, you can get all that any cultured person can expect from religion, by scrapping the substance and retaining the form. It is all a question of striking the correct emotional attitudes.

There was another Oxonian who went even further than Arnold in reducing religion to emotional dope. This was Walter Pater, who, far from presenting the exquisite figure in real life that his readers must have visualized, was a retiring and conventional don, with the appearance and moustache of a heavy dragoon. It was as early as 1868 that he had exhorted his disciples to burn with a hard, gem-like flame, and to get as many and as keen pulsations as possible out of the brief time that we have to exist. It was a flame that burnt not only hard, but froze. No writer with such æsthetic sensibilities was ever so devoid of human passion.

Pater was, at heart, just as much of a preacher, just as much of a pedagogue, as Arnold. He had none of the moral indifference that one associates with the cult of art for art's sake. Nobody but a don would have thought of suppressing, in a second edition, the conclusion of a book on *The Renaissance*—and the most significant part of that book—on the ground that "I conceived it might possibly mislead some of the young men into whose hands it might fall". Walter Pater had come with a grave sense of responsibility to proclaim a gospel, a message of salvation. He looked on art, literature, and—for the matter of that—religion, as "a refuge, a sort of cloistral refuge, from a certain vulgarity in the actual world". Such

a refuge, in fact, as a bachelor don's rooms, spotlessly neat, with blue china on the mantelpiece, and an outlook across the peaceful quad on to the grey walls of the chapel.

Pater, possibly because he was less human, realized more clearly than Arnold what precise use he had for the Christian religion. Not only his rooms, but the chapel opposite, afforded a refuge, a cloistral refuge, from "a certain vulgarity". The most complete exposition of his New Epicureanism, as he called his gospel, took the form of a novel, one of the few of the world's great novels that succeeds in practically ignoring the fact of sex. This was the life story of a rich young Roman, called Marius, who spends the whole of his brief life in a hunt for exquisite, and exquisitely refined sensations. He ends by joining the Christians, not because he has any particular belief in their doctrines, but because he finds that he is able to obtain a choicer brand of emotional stimulant, a securer refuge from "a certain vulgarity", in the communion of saints, than from his previous experiments in paganism.

Pater, and even Arnold, were only able to influence a comparatively small audience of intellectuals. But their attitude is none the less of significance. For what the intellectual accepts to-day, will have percolated to-morrow to the minds of Tom, Dick and Harry, and reappear, duly vulgarized, as the faith of the market-place. In the seventies, outside the Churches themselves, there is apparent a conviction, fast approximating to unanimity among men of light and leading, that the intellectual bottom has fallen out of what has hitherto passed for the Christian religion. Patronage like that of Arnold or Pater was even more damaging than the shrieking enmity of Swinburne, and the frontal assaults of Rationalists and Higher Critics. It would be better, one might have thought, for Christianity to be buried outright,

than for it to be embalmed and enshrined in a glass case of culture; better, too, for the Water of Life to be spilt on the ground than for its virtues to be proclaimed as a refined substitute for cocaine.

The most serious feature of the situation was the utter lack of spiritual leadership. It was hopeless to look to this from the clergy, whose minds were for the most part set upon the unrealities of sectarian controversy, and who were out of touch with the scientific and intellectual tendencies of the new age, whose problems they disposed of by refusing to recognize their existence. But those who were so busily engaged in demolishing the old certainties, had strangely little to offer in their place. It was one thing to destroy, it was quite another to create.

It had not yet dawned upon modern Man that his safe civilization might prove after all to be a City of Destruction, nor had he yet echoed the lamentable cry of Bunyan's man in rags—"What shall I do?" Had he done so, he would have obtained no very satisfactory answer from any lay or clerical guide who was likely to offer himself.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FAIRY TALE OF EMPIRE

It is only fair to concede that the men of religion were not unique in shirking the task of social and spiritual reconstruction, and retiring to a world peopled by the figments of their imagination, wherein they could exhaust their energies in struggles that had no more relation to reality than the battles of the cricket field and prize-ring.

The same description would apply, though in a lesser degree, to the warfare of Conservative and Liberal whose main battleground was at Westminster. We say a lesser degree, because it is impossible for those who conduct the business of government ever to get quite out of touch with reality. An extra penny on the income tax—for they thought in pennies in those days, and not in sixpences and shillings—is what Artemus Ward would have called "a darned uncomfortable reality", a thing that could hardly be said, with equal emphasis, about an extra candle on the Altar. But the politician is compelled by the nature of his calling to take his stand on issues that can be readily explained to the crowd on whose suffrages he depends, to rely on the quick emotional appeal, to discard subtlety and think in terms of slogans and headlines. This is not favourable to a policy framed in view of those underlying realities which the statesman, in his heart of hearts, may know to be vital. A philosopher with the arts of a cheap-jack may be a conceivable, he is certainly not a common figure.

To the average Englishman of the seventies, politics

had all the fascination of a duel. Conservative versus Liberal meant Dizzy versus Gladstone. Those two great figures, so impressive in themselves and so dramatically contrasted, had come to dominate the scene. The rest, the Lowes, the Salisburys, the Forsters, the Northcotes, were pygmies by comparison. All the conscious integrity of the great middle class was summed up in Gladstone. A godly, righteous and sober Liberalism, with increasing trade and diminishing taxation, were what he had to offer. What Disraeli stood for in the public eye is somewhat harder to define. Certainly not for whatever fine, old, crusted Toryism might inform the numskulls of fox-hunters from Eton. Nothing had ever less resembled the Tory of popular imagination than that inscrutable and rather dandified figure. It was just this inscrutability that was the secret of Disraeli's fascination. The ordinary man did not feel that he understood him as he understood Gladstone. He was an "oriental mystery"—the phrase stuck to him. Even *Punch*, which had persisted in treating him, for a quarter of a century, as the Ikey Mo of anti-Semite fiction, was sufficiently impressed by the successful passage of his Reform Bill to transform him into a Sphinx, colossal, mysterious, and a little sinister. There was a suggestion of magic—it might even be of black magic. It made people a little afraid of him . . . the new electorate did not take to him all at once.

In sober fact, Disraeli was a simpler and more human creature than either his admirers or opponents suspected. Take away that sphinx-like mask, and you would have found the features of a Peter Pan. An incurable romantic, his career had been one long fairy-story, with himself as the hero, and all the wonderful dreams coming true, even to the climax of arriving at the Palace, and producing by his wizardry an imperial crown for the brows of the great Queen—"the Faery", he called her, for Peter Pan had not

ceased to believe in fairies—and being told to kneel and rise, no longer the poor Jew boy, born in a library and sent forth into the great world to seek his fortune, but a Peer of Britain, with belt and ermine, the mighty statesman whom Queen-Empress and people united to honour, and who would live for ever in history as Beaconsfield.

It was make-believe, no doubt, but more healthy and attractive make-believe than that of ordinary politics. No wonder that Peter Pan threw himself into his part with the zest of perpetual boyhood, no wonder that he should have got himself up with the eyeglass and carnation buttonhole, the cynic smile, the grand manner, proper to his part in the fairy story! It was only the real Disraeli who never grew old or cynical, the child craving for affection, never satisfied with his success unless he had some understanding friend for audience. Not the least delightful part of his story is his attachment, in old age, to those two gracious ladies—one almost thinks of them as aunts—to whom he laid bare, day by day, all the secrets of his heart. One imagines that the keenest joy experienced in his hours of triumph arose from the thought of what a wonderful story this would be to tell Lady Bradford or Lady Chesterfield.

There was only one danger in all this—that the actor might get so absorbed in his part as to lose touch with mundane reality, to imagine that England was the realm of a real Faery Queen, Europe the Never-Never Land, and the Tsar, perhaps, Captain Hook. There might be playing at soldiers . . . women "cutting up what remains" on the slopes of Afghan passes, Zulus washing their assegais in the blood of lads from British villages—even if a catastrophe infinitely worse should just fail to materialize.

In 1874, England was in the mood for a new master. Under Gladstone's ministry, the country had enjoyed peace, prosperity, and reform, perhaps in too generous

a measure for perfect contentment. The influence of boredom on the course of history has never been sufficiently allowed for. It was probably the cause of the dry rot that, more than the Goth and the mosquito, accounted for the fall of the Western Roman Empire. There sometimes comes on nations a mood like that which makes people rolling in wealth charter aeroplanes for ocean flights, when the chances are against their finishing alive. Safety is a dull blessing without romance, colour, stimulus, and it is an unfortunate trait of mankind that it seldom appreciates when it is well off. Disraeli's keen eye had marked the growing unpopularity of the Gladstonian team. In one of his most superb flights of oratory he compared the Treasury Bench to "one of those marine landscapes not very unusual on the coasts of South America. Not a flame flickers on a single pallid crest. But the situation is still dangerous, there are occasional earthquakes, and ever and anon the dark rumbling of the sea."

There was something else than boredom that was undermining the ministry. It was prolific in reforms, but were they quite the sort of reforms that the new electorate was demanding? What the old, middle-class electorate had understood by reform was not what we should now call social, but political reform. Liberalism meant freedom, the freedom of everybody, in a capitalist society, to make the best use of whatever property he might have acquired or inherited. What it did not mean was any alteration of the distributive *status quo*, or the State taking over more than the necessary minimum of private property to be administered for the common benefit. The only considerable measure of social reform had been the Education Act, and about this Gladstone had been notoriously lukewarm.

The Liberal ministers, in fact, continued on their way regardless of the new masses of electors, who were

beginning to watch their proceedings with ever-growing suspicion. And they were unfortunate enough to find themselves faced with the necessity of settling the status of Trades Unions. This they did on what appeared to them not only liberal but generous lines. They formally freed the Unions from the taint of illegality, made them lawful and registered corporations, with a right that they had not possessed before, to sue their own dishonest officials. It made them free—but with this one proviso, that they should not use their freedom as a means of restricting that of the humblest individual workman. The practice of picketing during strikes was so severely restricted—even black looks coming within the scope of the law—as to make a successful strike almost impossible. For a strike is a form of war, and efficient warfare is inconsistent with liberty. It is a hopeless task at the same time to be faithful to Liberal principles and to satisfy the ambitions—the legitimate ambitions, as most working-class electors believe—of trades unionism.

Disraeli, who was not hampered by Liberal dogma, was ready to make social reform a plank of Tory policy, and the Liberals only harmed themselves by gibes at "a policy of sewage". Still more important, he was ready to satisfy the unexpressed demand for colour and magnificence by conducting the elector, as it were, to the top of a high mountain, whence he could see displayed, for the first time, a limitless vista of Empire. All these lands and the glory thereof should be John Bull's, if he would go to the poll and vote Conservative. Gladstone, on the other hand, had a bribe to offer that might well have ensured his success with the electorate of the First Reform Bill. The income tax had been reduced to threepence—he would take it off altogether. The electorate of the Second Reform Bill spurned the offer with contumely, and a Tory majority, overwhelming for those days, was

returned for the first time since Peel's triumph thirty-three years before.

The fairy story had now reached the last chapter, in which the hero has attained the summit of power, and has only got to rule the kingdom in happiness and prosperity ever afterwards. It seemed as if this programme was likely to be realized, for Disraeli in power had lost none of the wizard touch of the Oriental mystagogue. His purchase for the country of the Suez Canal shares was an episode of romantic fiction imported into real life. It is the one incident of recent history that has made a thoroughly exciting film. The crowning of the Queen as Empress of India was a symbolic act that made even the unimaginative islanders see visions of holding the gorgeous East in fee, and dream dreams of an Empire on which the sun never set. That prospect was all suffused with the roseate hues of Disraeli's imagination; there was no element of sordidness, and if there was danger, it was of that thrilling kind that no good fairy story ever lacks.

The drama rose to a climax when conveniently remote war-clouds began to darken over the Near East. It had been the complaint against Gladstone that he had never properly asserted the interests of the country, that he had wanted to be a Christian out of Church—even to the extent of submitting to arbitration the claims of the United States to be reimbursed for the exploits of the British-built cruiser *Alabama*. Another thing that he had done was to allow Russia to start building a Black Sea Fleet, in spite of the fact that about the one thing England had got to show for the bloodshed and misery of the Crimean "victory" was an undertaking on her part not to do so. It is not very clear what Gladstone could have done, beyond saving his country's face by getting the Russian action sanctioned by an International Congress, but it was at least clear that Russia

field, as he now was. The disturbing business of the Balkan atrocities was more or less forgotten; he had one task—to keep the Christian out of Constantinople. It would be a supreme triumph of his wizardry if he could win this victory not by violence, but by a masterpiece of diplomatic finesse. He set the stage for a war—no stupid Crimean slogging match, but one of Napoleonic brilliance, with an Indian expeditionary force striking into Central Asia, another army co-operating from Alexandretta, a third standing firm behind the Chetaldja Lines, with the fleet in support, guarding Constantinople. All the world watched breathless as first one daring move, and then another, brought the two Powers nearer and nearer to the abyss. The Russians wanted to dictate a treaty—the Englishman in the street was not very clear what precise harm he stood to derive from it, but he was bawling lustily:

> "We've fought the Bear a thousand times before,
> And they shan't have Con-stan-ti-nople!"

and if the Bear got the treaty he wanted, he would, in a sort of way, be "having" Constantinople. The only person whose calm was unruffled, when everybody else was losing his head, was the Premier. His task was even more difficult than the world knew, for his Faery had become something more like a Fury, ingeminating fire and slaughter, and ready to resign her crown rather than make the least concession to her good brother Alexander. The pace was too keen for the Foreign Secretary, Lord Derby, who, with another Cabinet Minister, resigned office. But Beaconsfield continued to play his pieces on the board with the calculated brilliance of a Morphy. The fleet was ordered, first to Besika Bay, and then up the Narrows, with the plain of Troy on one side and the heights of Gallipoli on the other. India made a dramatic appearance in arms, when, by the orders

The evidence of these and similar atrocities accumulated; it became overwhelming. Gladstone, who had announced his intention of retiring from the political arena, made a dramatic return. With burning eloquence he sought to arouse the moral indignation of Christian England. "Murder!" he cried, throwing a new meaning into the familiar lines,

> "Murder most foul, as at the best it is,
> But this most foul, strange and unnatural!"

The country thrilled with horror, but the Premier remained blandly impassive. For him the Bulgarian atrocities hardly existed. His part was to defeat the Bear; he could not change it at a moment's notice for that of crusader against the infidel. It would have been too much to expect a septuagenarian Peter Pan to step out of one fairy story into another.

And now the Bear was beginning to move. The Turk was too strong for his unaided Christians; orthodox Serbia had joined the revolt, had been beaten almost to her knees, and not for the last time, Russia was unwilling to see her crushed. After months of negotiation, the grey legions with their Tsar crossed the Danube; they thundered at the gates of the Balkans, and the Turk, who, for all his faults, was a born soldier, had at last a chance of appearing in a sympathetic rôle, as the little fellow defending himself against a giant. The eyes of all Europe were fixed upon besieged Plevna, where the heroic Osman Pasha thrice signally repulsed desperate assaults. At one time it seemed anybody's game—there was talk at Russian headquarters of a retreat behind the Danube, though the Tsar would have none of it. But at last numbers prevailed; the old defender of Sevastopol starved out Plevna; the Turkish armies went to pieces, and the Russians were sweeping on to Constantinople.

It was the supreme hour for Disraeli, or Beacons-

field, as he now was. The disturbing business of the Balkan atrocities was more or less forgotten; he had one task—to keep the Christian out of Constantinople. It would be a supreme triumph of his wizardry if he could win this victory not by violence, but by a masterpiece of diplomatic finesse. He set the stage for a war—no stupid Crimean slogging match, but one of Napoleonic brilliance, with an Indian expeditionary force striking into Central Asia, another army co-operating from Alexandretta, a third standing firm behind the Chetaldja Lines, with the fleet in support, guarding Constantinople. All the world watched breathless as first one daring move, and then another, brought the two Powers nearer and nearer to the abyss. The Russians wanted to dictate a treaty—the Englishman in the street was not very clear what precise harm he stood to derive from it, but he was bawling lustily:

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of her Queen-Empress, a division of Sepoys disembarked at Malta.

And then, when it seemed that the breaking-point had come, the tension suddenly relaxed—the Bear had at least yielded to the extent of allowing the settlement with Turkey to be submitted to a European Conference. But the danger of war was only postponed, and the centre of interest shifted to Berlin, where Prince Bismarck, as great a master of the realistic as Beaconsfield of the romantic touch, was acting the part of host and mediator. The Chancellor was not proof against the Premier's fascination. "The Old Jew", he exclaimed, "is the man!" For Disraeli had come to Berlin to guide the drama to its dénouement. There was the moment of deadly tension, when Russia was holding out on the question of whether the Sultan should be allowed to have garrisons in Eastern Roumelia, and Beaconsfield was on the point of leaving the Congress—which would have meant war. But he and Bismarck were working hand in glove, and the Bear, growling, gave back a pace or two. At last the end crowned the work, and there came the hour of supreme triumph, when the Premier returned, amid the wild plaudits of a grateful and intensely relieved nation, bringing back to his Faery what by universal consent was peace with honour.

There was one personal touch that made the triumph complete. Like Sancho Panza, the Disraeli of thirty years ago had dreamed of acquiring an island—he had made some fantastic sheikh in one of his novels talk of England taking over Cyprus. He now, as a lover might toss a trinket into his mistress's lap, presented Cyprus to England, to be her share of spoils for which she had not fought, while the real victors went away almost empty. It was the sort of thing that only happens in fairy stories.

How did it appear to that iron realist at Berlin?

It was a triumph, certainly, but hardly for England, or even—except in personal kudos—for her "old Jew". The Congress had succeeded precisely because, and in the way that, Bismarck had intended it to succeed. Faced with the undying enmity of France, who, against Bismarck's better judgment, had been robbed of two of her fairest provinces, it was his object to prevent her from obtaining allies, and therefore to secure the alliance of Russia and Austria, and at least the benevolent neutrality of England. There was only one flaw in this scheme—Russia and Austria were irreconcilably opposed in the Balkans; both coveted the lordship of those turbulent Christian communities which were now ripe for liberation from the Turk. It was unfortunate that there should be this rift in the Alliance of the Three Emperors, but if Germany had to take a side, it would be with her Teutonic kinsmen in Austria—and the less openly she could take it, the better. It would then be a matter for Bismarck's skill to re-insure his country against the enmity of Russia.

It was, under these arduous circumstances, a veritable godsend that England should be ready to do Bismarck's work for him, and tilt the Balkan balance in favour of Austria. The extraordinary result of Russia's victory was that Austria calmly appropriated—though without as yet formally annexing them—a couple of Jugo-Slav provinces from Turkey, while Russia, by way of some compensation for her victory, was forced to seize upon a strip of territory from her hitherto loyal ally, Roumania. The liberation of the Balkan Christians, on national lines, was successfully defeated. Some of them were handed back to the tender rule of the Turk, and what was left of Bulgaria was deliberately weakened by partitioning her, against the will of her inhabitants, into two provinces. The whole settlement turned out to have been about the worst conceivable alike from the standpoint of Eng-

land's interests and that of European peace. England had strengthened the hands of her future enemies, and weakened those of her future allies. She had sown seeds of war in every part of the Balkans. She had compromised her honour by bolstering up the unspeakable Turk, who was to turn and stab her for her pains. And as for her new island, the only people who stood to profit from the arrangement were the Cypriotes themselves, who were destined to show their appreciation of her rule by burning down the residence of a British Governor-General.

Those who are versed in fairy-lore tell of glittering hoards which the Little People bestow on favoured mortals. This wealth has a disconcerting way of vanishing into thin air during the night. It was a magnificent gift of fairy gold that the old Jew had brought back to England.

It would have been well for him had his life ended with the last chapter of his fairy story, and he had been spared three years of sordid and bleak anti-climax. It was as if, after his return from Berlin, the magic wand that he had wielded with such careless ease had been broken. Peter Pan had grown up at last into a tired old man, who had lost the secret of success.

Everything went wrong. So far from accepting his rebuff, the Bear had been provoked into a malignant enmity that outlasted the century. Bulked of her European ambitions, Russia began to push south-eastward, ever nearer to the Himalayan gates of India. The frontier state of Afghanistan was threatened; a Russian mission was received at Kabul and a British mission turned back from the frontier. It was obviously a case for the same sort of spirited policy as had brought about Peace with Honour, and the Premier had a Viceroy after his own heart, a romantic imperialist, to execute it for him. All went brilliantly to start with; rifles cracked in the passes, a British

army—not for the first time—entered Kabul, a British Resident, with his staff, was duly installed at the Court of a new and apparently submissive Ameer, and another point scored in the game against Russia.

Beaconsfield had perhaps acquired some of that "hubris", or insolent self-confidence, which is an offence to the gods. He was warned what would happen. The venerable Lord Lawrence, who knew more about India than any man living, uttered a solemn warning against trusting these English lives to Afghan faith. The Premier treated him with the insolent scorn that he had now grown accustomed to displaying towards opposition, and in which a Greek would have seen the sign of his approaching downfall. "They will all be murdered, every one of them", the ex-Viceroy predicted, and he was right. Another war, more bloody and expensive than the last, had to be undertaken. And in another part of the world, the forward policy landed England in another troublesome and unpopular war with the Zulu nation—a war that started with the humiliating episode of an English force, several hundred strong, being wiped out of existence by a wild charge through the scrub. The nation was beginning to wonder whether it would not after all be better to be godly and quietly governed by Gladstone than to be led into more and more trouble and expense by a superannuated magician.

CHAPTER IX

HARD TIMES ON THE LAND

If anyone, inclined to superstition, had been looking for evidence that Beaconsfield's "hubris" had become an offence to the gods, he might have found it in the appalling luck he and his government had with the weather. The sun, that had shone upon the Liberals, hid his face from the Tories, and as the decade drew to an end, the weather grew steadily worse. In 1879 the farmers were in despair. The crops rotted in the fields, because it was impossible to harvest them. In Ireland conditions were even worse; farmers were everywhere ruined, and agrarian discontent assumed dangerous proportions. And in England, popular opinion, which is as much affected by the weather as by any other consideration, began to turn against a government that seemed incapable of creating prosperity.

It was not only in agriculture, which was after all England's principal industry, that there was depression. Luck had been equally out in the sphere of commerce and industry. After 1874, the boom in trade was followed by a prolonged slump and fall of prices. How serious was the depression and its effect on the well-being of the people may be judged from the following eloquent statistics. Between 1869 and 1874 the annual number of marriages, reckoned in thousands, had risen from 176 to 202; by 1879, it had fallen to 182. The corresponding figures of the number of persons committed for trial are, 15, 12 and 13.[1] This means that while, in

[1] *From the History of Twenty-five Years*, by Sir Spencer Walpole, Vol. IV, p. 380.

1879, far fewer people could afford to set up house than five years earlier, the criminal population was swollen by those who had been driven by want into evil courses. The winter of 1878–9 was peculiarly distressful. Thousands of families in the towns were on the brink of starvation, and relief was organized on a large scale, the Prince of Wales taking a lead.

There was, however, one highly significant way in which the depression in commerce and industry differed from that in agriculture. It was destined to right itself. The cycle of lean years would be succeeded in due course by one of fat, and it would be found that there was still a net balance of progress, in spite of fluctuations. But what had happened in agriculture turned out to be something in the nature of a social disaster. For the leading English industry had received a set-back from which it was not destined ever properly to recover, and the great landed interest, which had counted for so much in English history, had the foundations of its power undermined.

The fact is that the series of bad harvests only had the effect of hastening on a decline which had been inevitable since Sir Robert Peel's abandonment of Protection, and which, it is arguable, no system of tariffs could have prevented, except at an unthinkably heavy cost to everybody except the landlords and farmers. Now that the United States had ceased to devote their energies to the destruction of American citizens and American wealth, they were free to develop their vast heritage of virgin lands that had formerly been the hunting-grounds of the Red Man. The Canadian Pacific Railway was stretching out from one ocean to another, and opening up that newly constituted Dominion's wealth of grain-fields. Russian and the Argentine were also becoming exporters of grain on a large scale. This competition with the British farmer for the home market was

constantly being intensified by the improvement of communications—railways, and, above all, steamships. So that when the harvests failed, the price of grain, instead of rising, actually continued to fall, reaching a record low level in the worst year of all, 1879. This, of course, was highly pleasant for the consumer, and no doubt prevented the distress in the towns from reaching the proportions of actual famine. But it spelt sheer ruin for the farmer, and struck a heavy blow at the owners of landed estates.

The situation was made worse by the fact that agriculture, if the first of English industries, had not become, to anything like the same degree as factory work, skilled and scientific. Farmer Giles was no doubt a picturesque figure, with his hard hat and gaiters, riding to hounds once or twice a week, but the best of his friends could hardly have called him an up-to-date specialist. While times had continued good, he had been content to plod along more or less as his fathers had done, trusting to the soil to do its part of the job of making ends meet. But now that poor Mr. Giles was able to bring less and less produce to market—not only because of the unspeakable weather but frequently because his stock was depleted by epidemic disease—he found that he could get less and less cash for what he did bring. He had no idea of adapting himself to the new conditions by the intensive application of scientific method, still less by organized co-operation—for suspicion of the man on the next farm was part of his nature. He had trusted the good times to go on for ever and had lived freely up to his income. But now things had come to such a pass, that he had no longer the means of raising the rent on quarter day. His landlord—to do him justice—was not usually a Shylock, and was loath to press him to extremities. But whether the matter was settled by the farm passing to another tenant for what it would

fetch in the market, or by the landlord consenting to go without part of his dues, the effect on the rent-roll was the same. The value of many great estates had been halved by the end of the century. Land had ceased to be a paying proposition.

The effect of this change was none the less profound because its consequences were not at first appreciated. To all appearance, country house life went on very much as it had before, nor was there any sensational change in the routine of a London season. The fact that the old walls of aristocratic exclusiveness had not fallen with a crash, like those of Jericho, but were swiftly and silently crumbling to ruin, was the less obvious, because the last thing the victorious besiegers wanted was to advertise their conquest. But one who lived in the country and observed what was going on about him would perceive how more and more old family estates were being sold up, and passing into the hands of those who, having made fortunes by business or speculation, valued the land less from a business point of view than as a means of achieving social merit. These newcomers were eventually—though not without much "contrivance" and expenditure of cash—successful in being "received", and taking their places, in the "county set".

It may be asked, what importance it was to anybody except the families themselves that the type of people embodied by Mr. Galsworthy in his squirearchal Hillcrests should be forced to yield up their old homes to that represented by the pushful Hornblowers, especially in view of the fact that the first object of the Hornblowers would be to turn the next generation of themselves into Hillcrests of the best public school and country house tradition. After all, English aristocratic society had never been incapable of absorbing a certain amount of new blood.

But now the absorption was destined to go far beyond saturation point. It was less a question of Hillcrest assimilating Hornblower, than of Hornblower beginning to flood out Hillcrest. The standards of English upper-class society were ceasing to be aristocratic and becoming plutocratic. Another way of putting it would be to say that a larger section of upper-class society was ceasing to have any standards at all, save those of Pope Leo X, who, on his election to the highest dignity of Christendom, exclaimed: "Now that we have the Papacy let us enjoy it." Try as he would to attain the Hillcrest standpoint, it never occurred to Hornblower that wealth and gentility were not to be enjoyed to their utmost capacity of exploitation.

Whether this were a good or a bad thing in the long run, it was part of a change that was at work in every department of life and thought. The earlier Victorian social system had at least presented an imposing appearance of stability. In spite of his belief in progress, the old Victorian had been a man of settled convictions, of rigid moral standards, and a social status more or less determined. Now everything—beliefs, morals, standards, status—was being thrown into the melting-pot. It had yet to be seen what the effect would be.

But with whatever good reason we may deplore the passing of the old regime, this at least must be conceded, that the Hillcrests, while they had had their chance, had signally failed to profit by it. They had indeed set a standard of public service and personal honour that cannot be over-praised. But at a time when intellectual guidance was more necessary than ever before in the world's history, they had neglected intellect and despised culture. They had no interest to speak of in either art or science. They put their trust in a system of education that, while training the will, acted as an almost infallible

extinguisher upon the intelligence. They were content to be men of leading without being men of light.

The alleged musical exploits of Nero and the bitter sectarian dissensions in Constantinople when the Moslem was thundering at the gates, were paralleled by the blind frivolity with which, while the gentry still had the chance of taking the lead in social and spiritual reconstruction, they flung themselves with furious energy into the task of outdoor amusement. There might have been something to be said for this, had they woven their sport, as the Greek did his athletics, into an ordered pattern of a life harmonious and beautiful. But racing, chasing and shooting had come to be pursued as ends in themselves. Fortunes and estates were dissipated on the turf, and an amount of energy and skill was put into the business of hunt organization that would have been invaluable if turned into socially profitable channels. And Hornblower, when he entered into the heritage, can hardly be blamed if he imagined that a sacramental devotion to such pursuits was the very acme of his coveted gentility. So far from his commercially bred intelligence serving to leaven the new upper class society, he was quite content, on entering the Holy of Holies, to deposit whatever he may have brought in the way of intellectual equipment, with some ostentation, in the outer courts.

Nevertheless, in fairness, we must not be blind to the other side of the picture—the extraordinary tenacity displayed by the Hillcrest class in resisting the complete submergence that threatened it. There is no upper class, anywhere in the world, that has retained so much of its position and prestige, and this is particularly so in districts remote from the great centres of population, Shropshire, for example, and Devonshire, to which even the motor-car cannot bring down noisy parties of joy-hunters for every

week-end. And whether Hillcrest or Hornblower has prevailed, it has certainly proved to be the case that the vast majority of county constituencies, under a universal suffrage, are as safe seats for the local gentry and their nominees as in the days of the unreformed Parliament.

BOOK III

THE EIGHTIES

CHAPTER I

THE NEW MACHIAVELLIANISM

A decade had passed since the bard of the *Prophetic Times* had lifted up his voice and warned his countrymen that the end was near. Now that the seventies had passed into the eighties, that catastrophe still hung fire, and the end did not seem to have got appreciably nearer. Certainly there had been " clouds of darkness ", the darkest of all being those literal rain-clouds that had ruined the last couple of harvests, and which the coming of winter had reinforced by a thick blanket of fog, but then no one but a farmer would have predicted an eternal recurrence of such damnable conditions. There had been wars—troublesome little wars that meant an extra penny or two on to that income tax which Mr. Gladstone had promised to abolish, but on the other hand there had been " peace with honour " and there was no apparent prospect of a major quarrel. England felt herself as safe behind her iron wall as she had ever been behind one of wood, and the Duke of Cambridge presided over the most smartly dressed army in Christendom. Times were certainly hard, with the rich cutting down their entertainments and the poor their meals, but there had been slumps before, worse than this, and a boom could not be far behind. Take her for all in all, England must have seemed, more than ever, an unpromising field for the activities of a Jeremiah.

Amid all the progress that continued to excite pæans, there was a feeling of comfortable sameness. 1880 was surprisingly like 1870. There was the same Queen in the same august and widowed seclusion, the same popular Prince and Princess at the head of Society, the one as genial, the other as youthful as ever, the same two master statesmen confronting each other at the head of the same parties, with Tennyson and Browning, Ruskin and Arnold, Darwin, Spencer and Huxley, Manning and Newman, Morris and Rossetti, unlost and seemingly unloosable leaders in their respective spheres. Even fashion repeated itself. Dresses had begun to stick out behind in 1870—they were beginning to stick out again in 1880.

If there had been a tendency for Englishmen to be bored with their sober prosperity, under a Liberal ministry, at the beginning of the decade, they appeared to have been effectually cured of it by the end. There was a growing desire to put back the political clock at the first opportunity to where it had been before Mr. Disraeli had been called to office. A dashing policy was well enough in its way, and Lord Beaconsfield was more firmly established than ever in the affections of his adopted countrymen—but there were those extra pennies on the income tax, and perpetual petty alarums and excursions were beginning to get on John Bull's nerves. Another Gladstone ministry, like the one that had been in power in 1870, would guarantee the quiet life for which he had begun to long.

Apart from the perpetual irritation about "the Bear" and his activities, the average Englishman was little enough concerned about what might be going on abroad. He was a shade less insular, owing to the ever-increasing facilities for cheap and comfortable travel, and perhaps also to the admirable way in which the artists of his illustrated papers provided

him with their impressions of personages and events beyond the seas. But he felt himself hardly at all concerned with such events, except as a benevolently interested spectator. Now that that troublesome fellow, Napoleon III, had quitted the stage, and now that the Balkan tangle had been unravelled, there seemed every prospect of a long period of peace. There was a sort of informal committee or Concert of the Great Powers for settling disputed questions, which Mr. Gladstone had made it one of the planks of his policy to cherish. And in the middle of Europe was the new-born German Empire, under its good old Protestant Kaiser, too strong to be attacked, too much of a "saturated Power" to be a menace to its neighbours—a mighty makeweight for a stable equilibrium. The "armed peace" had lasted through the decade—there seemed no reason why it should ever be broken.

There was one man, at least, who knew better—that Iron Chancellor who could make all the statesmen of Europe dance on the wires that he pulled from his room in the Wilhelmstrasse. The grey eyes beneath Bismarck's bushy brows were too clear-sighted to be deceived by the appearance of security. He knew—no one better—the desperate game he was doomed to play for his country's safety and for the peace of the world. It was the sign of his supreme mastery that the game looked perfectly safe and easy.

He had set out to unite Germany by Blood and Iron. He had done so, but at the price of making Blood and Iron supreme in Europe. There was no more nonsense about freedom and brotherhood. Every nation was out to seek her own, and more than her own, by any means. Every nation was arming to the teeth for an Armageddon, at some near or distant date, of which all were afraid, and for which all were feverishly preparing. Internationally it was a mad and barbarous world, far worse than

that which old Thomas Hobbes had visualized as being the primitive state of mankind. For Hobbes had merely imagined a simple anarchy of savages, honest and straightforward egotists with no particular interest in clubbing one another except in the way of business, but these enormous Leviathans called nations were not only unrestrained by any law or morality from injuring their neighbours, but were each actually engaged in working up primitive selfishness into malignant egomania. Each was staking out claims to his neighbour's property, claims that could only be satisfied by force of arms. Beyond the frontiers of every nation of importance lay territory that it coveted, and meant to have sooner or later. And there were nations crushed out of official existence that never ceased to dream of the day of their deliverance—by Blood and Iron. The one thing that kept the iron from striking and the blood from pouring was the fear that even the hardiest anarch had of the consequences. But the cult of intensive patriotism was everywhere being exploited to make that fear seem base and treasonable.

Bismarck was no philanthropist. He had no scruples, and no ideals beyond that of simple loyalty to the Leviathan of which he happened to be a cell. But his was—so far as such a thing is possible—a sane selfishness. Blood and Iron had served his purpose, and now he would fain have laid the demons he had evoked. He was never more sincere than when he described Germany as a saturated Power. Now that all was Deutsch from the Vosges to the Vistula, he had no sentimental dreams of expansion, even in the colonial field. Now that he had settled the account with France, he only desired to see Germany secure in the enjoyment of her heritage, and at peace with all the world.

But hardly had her victorious armies withdrawn behind their frontier than it was borne in upon

Bismarck that the account was not settled at all, and never would be so long as the black, white and red flag floated over Strassburg and Metz. It was the one great mistake which marred all the rest of his life's work, that he had given way to the generals on this point, as he had refused to give way when they had proposed to humiliate and destroy Austria four years before. A generous gesture to defeated France might have done more for the security of Germany than a score of fortresses. By robbing and humiliating her, Germany, for the best strategical reasons, had aroused all the unforgiving hatred of the insulted Latin. The peace concluded at Frankfurt would last exactly as long as France was restrained by fear from springing at her neighbour's throat. As Bismarck himself said with prophetic insight in 1887, "War is certain if France thinks she is the stronger and can win. That is my unalterable conviction. . . . If she won she would not display our moderation in 1871. She would bleed us white, and if we won, after being attacked, we would do the same. The war of 1870 would be child's play compared with 1890 or whatever the date."[1] Germany must therefore remain armed to the teeth and, as Bismarck put it, *toujours en vedette*.

At first, logically enough, he had toyed with the idea of invoking Blood and Iron once again, and finishing off France before she could fairly get on her feet. But here Queen Victoria, who, though a lover of Germany, was far from being a lover of Bismarck, threw her powerful influence into the scale for peace. It also became more than doubtful whether the Tsar would stand by in face of so outrageous a use of the Prussian jack-boot. So that simple solution had to be dropped, and Bismarck, for the rest of his life, devoted himself to the task of delaying the hour

[1] Quoted in *History of Modern Europe*, by C. P. Gooch, p. 132.

of ultimately inevitable reckoning. Out of no love for mankind, he had become the mighty Atlas on whose shoulders reposed the peace of civilization.

His problem could be simply stated. France would never dare to attack Germany single-handed. It would only be when, by some cunning system of alliances, she had got the odds in her favour, that she would dare make her spring. Hence it must be Germany's first object to keep her neighbour securely isolated. It might be worth trying to see whether her interests might be diverted into other and harmless fields of expansion, so that in time she would come to forget the rape of her two provinces. But the iron had entered too deeply into the Latin soul to render this a hopeful proposition. Even if Metz had been forgotten, the tramp of the Prussian regiments on their silly route march through the streets of Paris had awakened echoes that had never died away.

Bismarck had gone about his task with a skill and finesse never surpassed, if ever equalled, in the records of diplomacy. As far as the world could have been made safe for peace and for Germany, he made it so. His first move was to cement the bond of common interest uniting the three great Imperial Houses of Hohenzollern, Hapsburg, and Romanoff, the Holy Three denounced by Byron, the natural champions of autocracy and divine right in a world sown with the seeds of revolution, partners in a common crime, the partition and enslavement of Poland. So long as this League of Emperors held, nothing could shake any of its members, and Bismarck's problem was solved. But there was one fatal flaw in the scheme. In the most dangerous quarter of all Europe, the Balkan Peninsula, the ambitions of Austria and Russia came into fatal collision. Both coveted the inheritance of the Sick Man Turkey; both were prepared to go to all

lengths to get it. So long as this antagonism lasted, there was no guarantee of German and European security in an Entente of Emperors. Accordingly Bismarck had to look round for another combination. He decided that if the worst came to the worst, and Germany had to choose between one ally and the other, she must *hold fast to her Teutonic* kinsman on the Danube. Into this German-Austrian combination he sought to draw Austria's hereditary foe, Italy. This seemingly impossible feat he accomplished by a piece of Mephistophelean finesse. He *blandly persuaded France to forestall Italy* in the game of African grab by seizing Tunis. The bait was eagerly swallowed and Italy was as justly aggrieved as a burglar who finds his selected crib cracked by a rival. The result was the famous Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria and Italy, a solid military bloc embracing nearly the whole of Central Europe and *cutting the Continent in half.*

Even this was not enough for Bismarck. He had gained Italy, but he did not want to lose Russia. He therefore double-crossed his Austrian partner by inducing the Tsar to conclude a secret Reinsurance Treaty with Germany, that removed all danger of an attack from that side. There remained only England. *Bismarck* had no love for that hotbed of Liberal ideas, and the mutual dislike that existed between himself and Queen Victoria's daughter, the Crown Princess of Prussia, did not sweeten his feelings towards the country of her birth. But he was *not the man to let sentiment affect his political* combinations, and he would gladly have drawn England into his network of alliances. Failing this, he counted on at least her benevolent neutrality, and never did he dream of entering into naval, or even serious colonial rivalry with her. *That German* statesmanship should ever goad England into ranging herself on *the* side of France was a piece of suicidal

madness of which he could hardly have conceived even his eventual supplanters capable. In fact, he had found another African apple—this time of Anglo-French discord—in Egypt, and with the most engaging friendliness he pressed England to partake of it.

Thus was the peace of Europe secured by the man of Blood and Iron. He made no attempt to get at the root of her discontents or to heal the anarchy of her nations. Grievances were left to fester, hatreds were inflamed to fever heat, armaments were piled up with murderous prodigality, competitive tariff walls rose higher and higher. But the master diplomatist aimed at keeping the peace by sheer finesse, and, so long as he remained in power, he succeeded. France, chafing in impotent rage, saw every avenue of revenge barred against her. Germany was leagued with Austria and Italy, was reinsured against Russia, was friendly with England. There came a time when it seemed as if French patience could endure no longer. A rather ridiculous figure arose in a certain General Boulanger, who was hailed by the Parisian mob as the hero destined to accomplish *la revanche*. Old Emperor William, now a nonagenarian, was talking of riding West again, at the head of his armies. Even if those armies had gone through Belgium there seemed to be no chance of England going beyond a mild protest. But Bismarck kept his temper, and the crisis, and Boulanger, eventually fizzled out.

Europe was now launched upon an iron age of selfishness and realism. The supreme catastrophe of war had been held at arm's length by the might of one man's genius. But Bismarck could not last for ever, and when he was gone, who would be able to prevent hatred and anarchy, covetousness and mistrust, from sweeping on to their inevitable and murderous consummation? Bismarck knew, and

prophesied: the war would not come in his time, but come it would, and it would start in the Balkans.

England continued to bask in serene ignorance of these dangers that threatened her, together with the rest of the civilized world. It was nothing to her that Liberal idealism was a spent force on the Continent. Disraeli, an incurable romantic posing as a strong, silent superman, had given her a taste of something that might have passed for *realpolitik*. She had not liked the taste and had put the splendid chalice from her. Mr. Gladstone was the man to whom she instinctively turned for leadership, Gladstone, who believed that a nation was a moral entity, that honesty and justice were the best policy, and that a merely selfish patriotism was unworthy of Christian England. "Remember", he was not afraid to say, "that He who has united you as human beings in the same flesh and blood, has bound you by the law of mutual love; that that mutual love is not limited by the shores of this island, is not limited by the boundaries of Christian civilization. . . ." Imagine such language on the lips of Bismarck! This moral fervour was reinforced by a truly bourgeois canniness, that nobody, at the time, thought incongruous. A forward policy, dictated by selfishness, was thoroughly bad business. Mercy and profits had met together, economy and peace had kissed each other.

In the election of 1880, Gladstone's personality and principles carried all before them. When he went North to the constituency of Midlothian, that he had elected to contest, his progress was a triumph such as no English statesman had enjoyed since it had "rained gold boxes" on the elder Pitt. Wherever the train stopped crowds thronged the platform waiting for a speech; even where it did not stop, they thronged to catch a glimpse, if it might be, of the hero of the hour. It seemed to Gladstone, now

turned seventy, as if the arm of the Lord had visibly bared itself for work he had made His own. The hand of God was upon him, and he denounced Beaconsfield and his Tories with all the fervour of a revivalist.

The electorate was ripe for conversion. There was a tremendous swing back to Liberalism. It seemed as if England had determined to rest true to her own self and her ideals, whatever monstrous gods her neighbours might choose to go whoring after. Blood and Iron were not for her. The good old cause of freedom was the good old cause still, and she was prepared to seal it with a thumping majority. In 1880 she took her stand where she had taken it in 1868. The more she progressed, the more she remained the same. Her righteousness endured, how then could she be moved?

CHAPTER II

RIGHTEOUSNESS IN ACTION

"I should be my first if I could throw my second and hit my whole." Such was *the amiable riddle* which some of us can remember to have been current in the days of our childhood, and the answer was—"Gladstone"! Surely, if Queen Victoria ever tolerated a joke, she must have condescended to an august chuckle when this one was explained to her, and perhaps may even have vouchsafed the momentous admission, "We are amused."

It is not so difficult for us to understand the transports of enthusiasm into which Gladstone was capable of lashing great masses of men, as it is to realize the *intensity of hatred with which he was regarded by so* many other people, from his Sovereign downwards, *in the latter stages of his career.* In an age of respectability, his was a pre-eminently respectable figure; in an age of earnestness, he was second to none in God-fearing piety; in an age that prized domesticity, his home life approached perfection. And yet one can cite an instance, probably not unique, in which a lady, more than thirty years after his death, has positively refused to sit down at table opposite to a portrait of "old Gladstone". When asked why, she has answered with intense *feeling*—"What, opposite that horrible man!" and declined any further explanation.

Gladstonophobia was capable of taking even more grotesque forms. Mr. Gladstone and his wife were known to be particularly interested in the rescue of what they would have called "fallen women". There were opponents who were known to have offered

large rewards for the report of any indiscretion that would have formed the basis of a plausible scandal. It was perhaps some echo of the stories that were invented at this time that caused one unfortunate biographer, of the modern school, to cap a rival's dipsomaniac Gordon with his own nymphomaniac Gladstone—only, unlike that rival, he failed to get away with it. Perhaps the strangest case of all is that of a great Tory nobleman, who had the interior of all the chamber utensils in his castle adorned with portraits of the G.O.M., the one reserved for his own use being provided with a conveniently enormous eye.

On the other hand, seldom had any statesman been so extravagantly loved. His name was one to conjure with far beyond the bounds of England. In Italy, in Greece, in the Balkans, his reputation as the friend of liberty and international righteousness was an asset of priceless value to his country. Whatever might be the feeling of their betters, the common people heard him gladly, and this in spite of the fact that he never condescended to the ordinary arts of the demagogue—he invariably assumed that his audience was inspired by as high moral sentiments as himself, and was as capable as the House of Commons of appreciating the sonorous, but meticulously qualified periods that he thundered at it with inexhaustible facility, and with just a suspicion of the Northern burr in his voice :

> He holds them with his glittering eye,
> They cannot choose but hear.

It was perhaps this power, and Gladstone's willingness to use it, that accounts for the otherwise inexplicable resentment he aroused in those who did not come under his spell. Incapable though he was of sympathizing with any doctrine remotely tending to political or social revolution, he was arousing a new spirit which they instinctively felt to be dangerous. Politics had continued to be a gentlemanly game in

spite of the Reform Bill. Statesmen would orate for hours on end in the House, and enliven their discourses with classic tags for which no crib was supposed to be needed. But the utmost any self-respecting minister would do outside, was to deliver, like Lord Palmerston, an occasional address, perhaps once a year, to his constituents, and even he was thought to be going rather far when he indulged in verbal sparring matches with a butcher. But Gladstone accepted the logical consequences of a democratic franchise. Demos was Cæsar; to C[illegible] subtleties of Disraeli' [illegible] arouse the moral indig[illegible] He was capable, when roused, of using language about the rich and comfortable classes calculated to put the most undesirable notions into the heads of those to whom God, in His accommodating wisdom, had assigned a humbler station of life. No wonder that Queen Victoria was in a state bordering on panic when she realized that this dangerous firebrand was to be forced on her in the capacity of Prime Minister.

But it was not only as the herald of a new spirit that Gladstone was disliked. If in one sense he was an innovator, in another he was a reactionary. He had no part nor lot in the intensive nationalism that already reigned supreme on the Continent, and whose influence was already beginning to be felt in England. Beaconsfield, on being twitted with the selfishness of his policy, had replied complacently that it was as selfish as patriotism, and Beaconsfield's admirers trusted him for the precise reason that he could be relied on to play the game for his side with the single object of scoring, by every available means, every possible point. They had no use for moral scruples that merely cramped their champion's style. Such a conception of patriotism was regarded by Gladstone with literally a holy horror, and in coming forth from his retirement to oppose Beaconsfield and all his works,

he was acting in the spirit of Elijah—"If the Lord be God, serve him, and if Baal, serve him." In his solemn self-communings on the eve of his seventieth birthday, he spoke of his battle for justice, humanity, freedom and law, and of himself as having been forced into the work as a great and high election of God.

But the Man of the People and the Man of God did not complete this strangely complex personality. There was another Gladstone, the hardened politician, with already nearly half a century's experience of the wire-pulling and compromise that are, day in and day out, among the necessities of a political career. The major prophet of the platform might present quite a different aspect in the lobby or the cabinet room. A curious sidelight on his state of mind is afforded by an incident that occurred at this time. Gladstone's moral indignation had happened to take the strange form of insulting Austria, by a platform statement that you could nowhere put your hand on the map and say, "Here Austria has done good"—though anyone who had seen the Turkish cannon ball lodged in the wall of her old cathedral will not have much hesitation in putting his hand on Vienna. When Gladstone came into office there was not unnaturally trouble with the Austrian ambassador, and the Premier's way of dealing with it was by a naïve admission that, at the time the *Philippic* had been launched, he had been "in a position of greater freedom and less responsibility". The doctrine of degrees of responsibility for the spoken word—especially on the lips of a moral evangelist—is, to put it mildly, casuistical.

But there was a curious streak of inconsistency running through Gladstone's career. There were times when he seemed capable of playing fast and loose with his principles. Who could have predicted that the champion of freedom would have come out as

the supporter of the slave-holding South against the North? Why should the right of peoples struggling to be free be valid in Bulgaria but void in Egypt? Why should there be one law for Catholic Ireland and another for Protestant Ulster? It was not that Gladstone was capable of conscious dishonesty, but that his mental grasp was by no means commensurate with the terrific force of his will. Those who have tried to wade through the long and dreary record of his writings and correspondence can never, for a moment, have felt themselves in contact with a mind of the first order, such a mind, even, as that of Disraeli, whose sayings stick in the memory, while the thunders of Gladstone have long ago rumbled into oblivion.

Such was the man who had been called to office in order that he might bring back his country to the paths of peace and Liberalism, and that he might dissociate her once and for all from the cult of Blood and Iron, of national egotism and greed, that had already captured the Continent. Let but England stand for righteousness and freedom, and those other things, power and prestige and prosperity, would follow in their train as surely as night follows day. A ministry was formed to put these principles into practice. It was not exactly the team of idealists that one would have expected after the heroics of Midlothian. Half of its members were opulent and worldly-wise noblemen, who would never have harboured anything so ill-bred as enthusiasm. Even the Queen would have felt herself quite safe with Lord Hartington or Lord Granville at Downing Street. The chief concession to democratic progress consisted in the admission to the Cabinet of the Radical Mayor of Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain, but this was rather in Gladstone's despite than with his good will. And there was John Bright as at least one whole-hearted exponent of Christian idealism among nations.

History records no more tragically ironical contrast

than that between the promise of Gladstone's ministry, and its performance during the five and a half years of its existence. Blood and iron in Egypt, disaster in the Sudan, coercion rampant in Ireland, the Transvaal Boers driven to assert their freedom by throwing their British masters, bag and baggage, out of the country . . . was it for this work that the arm of the Lord had bared itself? And yet the fault was not that of the peaceful and high-principled policy to which the Man of God had pledged himself at Midlothian, but to the fact that Gladstone, the politician, lacked the strength or the consistency to translate that policy into deeds.

He had started fairly enough by courageously scrapping the forward policy by which, in Afghanistan, Beaconsfield and his Viceroy had already involved the country in two wars and one massacre. The right and prudent way with the Afghans was to clear out of their territory, and leave them to manage their affairs in their own way. Yes—but the imperial strategists had discovered the key of India in the Afghan city of Candahar, behind whose walls the remains of an Anglo-Indian army, beaten in a pitched battle at Maiwand, had taken refuge. The most sensible word on this subject was curiously enough spoken by Beaconsfield himself. Early in March, 1881, when the shadows were already beginning to close round him, he came, keyed up by drugs, to the House of Lords, to make what was to prove his last considerable pronouncement on public affairs. Mr. T. P. O'Connor, who witnessed the scene, reported that he had "a dreadfully inanimate look" and appeared "like a man in a dream". "There are", said Beaconsfield, "several places that are called the Keys of India. There is Merv . . . then"—and the old man's memory wandered—"there is a place whose name I forget . . . but, my Lords," he said, gathering himself together for the last of those oracular pro-

nouncements which are among the immortal things of politics, "the key of India is not Herat or Candahar. The Key of India is London." Beaconsfield did not live to see the reversal, that he had thus magnanimously justified, of his own policy. The defeated army, of course, had to be extricated, and General Roberts's brilliantly staffed march from Cabul to Candahar wiped out the humiliation of Maiwand. After that the key was left to the Afghans to turn if they could, and in that part of the world at least Britain contrived to cut the losses of a forward policy and to live, if not exactly in love and amity, at least in peace with her neighbours.

Among the victims of Disraeli's policy whose wrongs Gladstone had eloquently pledged himself to redress were the Transvaal Boers, whose country had been annexed to England in 1877. It was only natural that the Boers, being simple folk, should have imagined that Gladstone would have lost no time in honouring his word, and leaving them, as well as the Afghans, to their own devices. Instead of which, the Boers received a curt intimation that under no circumstances could the Queen's authority in the Transvaal be relinquished. Partly the explanation may have been that Gladstone was toying with some idea of South African federation under the Crown, but his inaction is probably even more due to the fact that old men cannot be bothered with too many things at once, and accordingly the Transvaal had to wait till the Premier had leisure to think about it. There seemed no hurry; the military governor was a certain Sir Owen Lanyon, a young colonel with a creditable record of service against black men, who applied the methods of the drill sergeant to the rule of a freedom-loving people, and complacently assured the home authorities that there was no chance of trouble. So the Boers not unnaturally took the only way left to them of vindicating the principles of

Gladstone drunk with rhetoric against the practice of Gladstone sober in office, and the Government found themselves called upon to deal with a people " rightly struggling ", in Gladstonian language, " to be free ".

The Government, which, to do it justice, only wanted to get out of the mess on any terms that would have saved its face, now utterly lost control over the situation. The British commander in Natal, Sir George Colley, was reputed to be a master of tactics, and with the handful of trained regulars at his disposal esteemed himself fully capable of dispersing any mob of undisciplined and un-uniformed farmers that might attempt to bar his way to the relief of the besieged British garrisons. He tried a frontal attack, in the best Aldershot style, and the Boers, all of them expert marksmen, fired into the target presented by the advancing line, and shot it to pieces. The Government now decided to grant the substance of the Boer demands, and Colley was instructed to forward a proposal to Kruger, the Boer chief, for a suspension of hostilities. All would have been well had Colley waited for an answer, but a bright idea struck him—he would retrieve his laurels as a tactician by seizing, during the night, a certain Majuba Hill that dominated the Boer position at Laing's Nek. The Boers were at first greatly impressed, and had actually begun to inspan their oxen. But on second thoughts they decided to pit the tactics of the hunter against those of the theorist. Creeping from rock to rock, they reached the crest, practically unharmed, and commenced picking off the astonished redcoats as if they had been a head of buck, finally stampeding them in wild panic, and killing their leader. Gladstone was at least firm enough to abstain from what he rightly described as the blood-guiltiness of using the now overwhelming forces that were mustering under Colley's successor, to avenge this entirely legitimate act of self-defence, and he conceded the terms that

the Government had already offered and the Boers would have been prepared to accept, if Colley had given them time to do so, namely, independence under British suzerainty, a word to which it was hard to attach any precise meaning. But the episode was not one of which any Englishman could be proud, and it was plain to the world that it had needed the argument of leaden bullet to make Gladstone in office honour the word and principles of Gladstone out of office.

The contrast between promise and performance was most glaring of all in Egypt. This is not the place to tell the long and intricate story of how a Government, pledged to Liberalism and non-aggression, succeeded in following the steps of Esarhaddon and Cambyses, and effecting the military conquest of the Nile valley. It is the more extraordinary when we reflect that even Beaconsfield had resisted the temptation of embarking on such a venture. Bismarck had dangled that bait before him in vain at the time of the Berlin Conference—but perhaps it was that the cunning old Jew had for once penetrated the Chancellor's real motive, for ever since Napoleon's time France had regarded Egypt as her special preserve. It is more probable, however, that he was clinging to his obsession of preserving the Turkish Empire intact.

When the government of righteousness rushed in armed, where even Beaconsfield had feared to tread, it did so in no higher capacity than that of usurer's bailiff. Egypt had been under the rule of a by no means wholly contemptible despot, Ismail by name, who intended to cut a magnificent figure in the world—he had dazzled Napoleon III and his beautiful consort by the magnificence of his hospitality at the opening of the Suez Canal; for him Verdi had composed the opera *Aïda*. To do him justice, his extravagance was not entirely selfish, for he had grandiose schemes of building public works. But all had to be paid for by wringing the uttermost farthing

out of the wretched peasantry. Nor was Ismail content with the plunder of the living. He would finance his projects as Christian nations financed their wars, by pledging the credit of posterity. Long after he was dead and rotten, the fellaheen of the Nile should sweat and starve for things he had enjoyed—and if to the end of time, so much the better.

This was a highly convenient arrangement also for the Western financier and investor. For if Ismail got the uttermost farthing in taxation out of his subjects, it was not unfair that the uttermost rate of interest should be screwed out of Ismail. And to do that merry gentleman credit, he was no skinflint. He had no grasp of economics, and provided he could get what he wanted by the simple process of subscribing his signature, he did not greatly care what form of words might happen to be over it. The morrow—and posterity—could take thought for the things of itself. And so the retired clergyman, the poor widow, the thrifty French *rentier*, could just contrive to make both ends meet by taking up Egyptian Bonds, and sucking the life-blood of the Fellah through a long pipe that passed through the palace of Cairo.

Egyptian Bonds were a godsend provided only that one could be sure of their being paid punctually every half year. It was whispered among financiers that high interest meant bad security. What if the pipe should break somewhere, and the Egyptian appropriate to himself the fruits of his own toil? Such dishonesty was not to be thought of for a moment. What were armies and fleets, what were Martinis and Gatling guns for, if not to keep dusky defaulters up to the mark? Ismail might go finally bankrupt, and retire into a luxurious private life, but Ali and Hassan must go on paying for their ex-sovereign's megalomania, or Sir Garnet Wolseley and seventeen thousand Englishmen would know the reason why.

One cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs, and Gladstone could not maintain the solvency of Egyptian Bonds without crushing, by blood and iron, an insurgent people wrongly—it is to be presumed—struggling to be free. A certain Arabi Pasha, an officer in the Khedive's service, put himself at the head of a military revolt, whose object was to assert the principle of Egypt for the Egyptians. The Khedive was no countrymen of theirs, and Arabi might naturally have expected the sympathy of Gladstone for the policy of expelling this particular Turk, bag and baggage. But when he went further to apply "bag and baggage" to the foreign bums who were there to exact perpetual usury from Egypt on the Turk's account, there was nothing for it but to shoot and shell those Egyptian patriots into a proper sense of their obligations.

It had been originally proposed to levy forcible distraint in conjunction with France, but owing to one of the usual kaleidoscopic changes in French politics, the French suddenly decided to back out when it became a question of actual bloodshed. But Gladstone was determined to stick at nothing, and it is on record that he seriously contemplated *inviting* the unspeakable Sultan to "restore order" with *those self-same* Turkish troops whose atrocities he had so recently denounced throughout the length and breadth of Britain. A picturesque spectacle was witnessed of British warships steaming leisurely up and down, pounding to pieces the forts of Alexandria, and slaughtering a number of their defenders variously estimated between 300 and 2,000. The immediate effect was the opening of the jails and a regular pogrom of Christians, followed by the landing of bluejackets and the shooting down of Moslems. Then, after an interval, there came news of lifeguardsmen sabring and Bengal Lancers pigsticking terrified "Gippys" as they fled across the desert, of a night

march under the stars, of pipes skirling in the dawn and Highlanders plying the bayonet inside Arabi's redoubts at Tel-el-Kebir, of the citadel of Cairo surrendered.

It was for a time doubtful whether a leaf would not be taken out of the Roman book, and the triumph graced by the slaughter of the enemy chief. Queen Victoria's simple soul was, as she herself put it, "distressed and alarmed" that "that arch-rebel and traitor Arabi (who she believes *everyone*, including Mr. Gladstone himself, wish should meet the punishment he deserves)" should so much as be provided with the means of defending himself at his trial. But for once Mr. Gladstone had only too little need of being kept up to the mark by his Sovereign. He himself was "almost", as he characteristically expressed it, "driven to the conclusion" that the captive general was "a bad man", and ought to pay the extreme penalty. On which Gladstone's biographer, John Morley, has the following ineffable comment:

"It is a great mistake to suppose that Mr. Gladstone was all leniency, or that when he thought ill of men he stopped at palliating words or at half-measures."

Luckily for the honour of England, Gladstone did eventually escape from the blood-guiltiness of having allowed the patriot leader to be done to death by the Khedive, and Arabi, instead of sharing the fate of Hofer and Wallace, was sent into not uncomfortable banishment at Ceylon. Thus were two sovereigns united in the bond of common grief. Queen Victoria was begged to send a soothing message to Khedive Tewfik. "It will give him courage", wired Lord Dufferin, "to face his womankind, who are frantic." But the enraged old lady stood stoutly by her sex. "The 'womankind'", she wrote, "show a right feeling in being 'frantic'", and nothing would induce her to compliment their lord and master on weakness

of which she "*so highly disapproves*"—even though she blames it entirely on to her Government.

One who was horrified for somewhat different reasons was the good old Quaker, John Bright, who found it so difficult to reconcile the bombardment of Alexandria with the principles of Christian morality that he retired from the Government.

Of course England had only conquered Egypt with the intention of evacuating it as soon as her self-imposed duty of restoring order should be accomplished, and of course the date of that evacuation was, and is fifty years afterwards, timed for the Greek Kalends. Blood calls for blood, and no sooner had Arabi's army been safely dispersed than the whole of Egypt's vast hinterland of the Sudan burst into a flame of holy war. A false prophet—so Her Britannic Majesty characterized him—was carrying everything before him. The Prophet of Midlothian was at his wits' end. He had counted on a short and not too expensive war against Egyptians who could be trusted to run away, but he had not reckoned on being plunged into a fresh war with fanatics of whom these same Egyptians were too frightened even to run. The butcher's bill of his Government would top that of its predecessor. But what was to be done? Was England, having struck the sword out of Egypt's hand, to let her be deprived of those upper waters of the Nile, the control of which, even in the days of the Pharaohs, had been regarded as vital to her prosperity? Perhaps she might agree to cut Egypt's loss, at a pinch, but even so, could she abandon the Egyptian garrisons in the Sudan to the fate that awaited them at the hand of the Mahdi's hordes?

Gladstone had studied the classics, and he knew the functions of a *deus ex machina*. If he could not afford an army, he might trust to the magic of one man's personality to solve at least the problem of the garrisons. Such a man was General Gordon, who

had made an invincible army out of unwarlike Chinamen, and might perform a similar miracle with Egyptians. Gordon was in action what Gladstone was in eloquence, a man conscious of a divine mission, strong in the Lord and the power of His might. He was also a man of chivalrous honour. The task he had been sent to perform was a forlorn hope from the start, and the flashes of intuitive genius, by which alone he might have had an off-chance of accomplishing it, were quenched by the veto of his superiors, the Government at home and Sir Evelyn Baring, the British agent in Egypt.

What the Government appears to have expected of Gordon was that he should give up his mission as a bad job, and save his own skin by leaving the garrisons to their fate. But the people of Khartoum, where he had made his headquarters, had trusted him as if he had been an angel of deliverance. To clear out and leave them to the Mahdi's tender mercies was unthinkable. He therefore declared positively that he would not leave the Sudan till everyone who wanted to go down had had a chance to do so. "If any emissary or letter comes up ordering me to come down, *I will not obey it, but will stop here and fall with the town and run all risks.*" Gordon was, by Gladstone's own admission, a hero of heroes, but it does not need a hero of heroes to take the only course open to a gentleman.

The tragedy of Gordon's fate is so rich in dramatic incident that one is apt to overlook the fact that to hold that ill-fortified and ill-provisioned town from March of one year to January of the next, with troops too cowardly, under normal circumstances, to retain the use of their legs at the sight of a dervish, constitutes one of the finest feats of arms in history. The Government—or a majority of them—would not have stuck at leaving Gordon to take the consequences of his obstinacy. Gladstone in particular had no patience

with a man of God who was so little a man of the world. He too could stand to his guns, for like a certain absentee Irish landlord, the Grand Old Man was not to be intimidated by threats to murder his agent. But public opinion was less stoical, and was rising to fever heat as the months passed and nothing was done. Even Lord Hartington's ponderous intelligence was waking to the consciousness that to leave Gordon to be starved out and murdered was one of those things that are not done. Of course the expedition was at long last got under way, and even so, when every hour was of importance, nothing would satisfy the "brass hats" but to make a full-dress affair of it, to spend weeks collecting a staff and discussing plans and perfecting details of organization. Everyone knows the sequel—the blow struck in the air; the steamboats of the relief force arriving just too late; Gordon's head stuck between branches with the kites pecking at his eyes, as others have since pecked at his good name.

The Queen was never more representative of her people than when she told her Prime Minister, with studied publicity, exactly what she thought of him. It was a long, long way from Midlothian to Khartoum! But here, after the shedding of more blood than had ever been charged to the account of Beaconsfield, was England with her foot firmly, though not formally, planted in Egypt, and the Queen-Empress in fact, though not in title, a Queen Pharaoh, in succession to Hatshepsut and Cleopatra. It is only fair to say that England, in compensation for her offices as publican, gave Egypt incomparably the best administration that the land had enjoyed since the days of the Cæsars. To be efficiently governed by infidels was not the same thing as Egypt for the Egyptians, but not more different than the reality of Empire founded in the lust for dividends and achieved by Blood and Iron, from that vision of human beings

united in the bonds of mutual and all-embracing love, that Gladstone the righteous had conjured up in the mind's eye of his countrymen—could it have been only five years before?

CHAPTER III

THE IRISH ULCER

There was a man in whom the spirit of the new age was more dramatically embodied even than in Bismarck. He was a ruthless and uncompromising realist, of passionless exterior, few and rough-hewn words, a forbidding manner, and an imperious will that swept resistlessly to its goal over all obstacles and all scruples. The impelling force of that will was a fierce and bigoted nationalism. He had neither romance nor sentiment in his composition, or if he had, he kept them for that part of his life which was hidden as long as possible from the world. His names was Charles Stewart Parnell.

With the breeding of an aristocrat, he combined—what was not uncommon in English aristocrats—the education of a boor. But this Irishman had what no study could impart, a vision that pierced, like an X-ray, to the heart of problems of which other men could see only the surface. He, alone among his countrymen, saw that the English conquest of Ireland, as established in the Act of Union of 1801, though it seemed to put Ireland at the mercy of England, might have precisely the opposite effect, if only Ireland knew how to play the cards that fate, and England, had dealt into her hand.

Any Irishman could see that the Act of Union was but a mockery of free government as far as Ireland was concerned. Such of the Irish representatives as did not range themselves with one or other of the orthodox British parties, formed a group that could be voted down on every issue, and whose chief

privilege was that of letting off a little harmless steam. Meanwhile the English garrison of landlords, mostly absentee, remained fastened like leeches on to her soil, and exploited their privileges with a vigour that no medieval baron—whose serfs had at least had security of tenure—would have dreamed of applying. The condition of the Irish peasantry, their numbers halved by famine, rack-rented if they improved their holdings, flung out of their cabins to starve if the landlord's optimism or covetousness failed to materialize on rent day, was, according to such impartial testimony as that of General Gordon, worse than that of any people in the world. That a folk so crushed and helpless could have the power of dictating terms to its conquerors seemed wildly impossible. And yet the clear-sighted realism of Parnell divined that the means of effecting this miracle were actually at Ireland's command.

If John Bull had been a conscious or logical tyrant, he might have succeeded better. But in his own honest estimation he was no tyrant. He really believed in the justice and fair play of the settlement he had imposed on his neighbour. Galway, in proportion, was more generously represented than Kent in Parliament. If Paddy had to pay his rent, so had Hodge. What was sauce for the English goose was sauce for the Irish gander. Accordingly John Bull was scrupulous in preserving all the forms of constitutional liberty, however little these forms might signify in reality. But—and this was Parnell's discovery—in conceding to Ireland but a counterfeit of liberty, England had also fatally compromised her own. Quite a small group of Irishmen could turn the Mother of Parliaments into a bear-garden. A compact Irish party must sooner or later find itself holding the balance between English Liberals and Tories, and consequently in such a position of power that no ministry could hold office save by its per-

mission and on its terms. The *minimum of these* terms would be Home Rule, with as near an approach to independence as possible.

To attain this end, nothing would serve short of a policy as ruthless and at the same time as coolly thought out as Bismarck's Blood and Iron. Many an Irish patriot had believed in shedding blood long before Parnell, who always shrank from crude violence, appeared on the scene. There were the Fenians, a party of physical force mostly recruited from among the American Irish; there was the formidable league called the Clan na Gael. But sporadic violence offered no remedy for Ireland's discontents. John Bull was nothing if not obstinate, and an occasional outrage only had the effect of putting up his back.

When Parnell was first elected to Parliament in 1875, he found the Irish party in a state of amiable and accepted impotence. Its leader was Isaac Butt, a man of the old-fashioned Liberal persuasion. He was a *good-hearted, companionable fellow of whom* everyone was fond, and whom hardly anyone took seriously. He was allowed to waste the time of Parliament by an annual motion in favour of Home Rule, which was tolerantly debated and duly thrown out.

"They know", said *Punch*, in 1874, of Butt and his followers, "that the ear of Parliament is closed, the mind of Parliament made up, on the point, even as the ear and mind of John Bull out of Parliament."

Punch was moved to a good deal of rather heavy merriment about a Butt without a bottom, a Butt that won't hold water, and so forth, while the idea of an Irish Parliament struck him as so excruciatingly funny—and Irish—that he formulated a set of standing orders for it, as for instance that the Speaker should not speak except when he is talking. Which

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gentlemanly English badinage was the reward of gentlemanly Irish behaviour.

There was another member of the Irish party who was, like Punch, a hunchback, a coarse-grained, libidinous, uneducated Ulsterman called Joseph Biggar. This man had no use for gentlemanly methods, and did not want to be popular—at any rate with Englishmen. He desired nothing better than to be the best-hated man in the House of Commons. There was taking shape in his mind a policy for Ireland that was the same, in principle, as that of Moses for Israel. The people were being held in bondage, and the only way to soften the heart of Pharaoh and induce him to let them go was to afflict him with such plagues that the situation would become intolerable. The plague that Biggar had in store for the Mother of Parliaments was called obstruction. The House was a gentlemanly assembly, and its rules had been framed, like the constitution of Republican Rome, on the understanding that they would be applied in a reasonable spirit. But Biggar did not want to be reasonable. He was like a mechanic with the run of a factory, doing his damnedest to smash or clog or corrode the machinery. He was one of the worst speakers that ever held forth, but the rules put no limit on the length of a member's eloquence, and it was nothing to Biggar that he was irrelevant and inaudible, provided that he could be also interminable.

And yet he cannot be said to have started the game of obstruction. English members had been for some time in the cheerful habit of taking advantage of the rules to block Irish bills. But they had never dreamed of such a counter offensive, *au fond*, as this which was now launched against them. They watched in impotent fury as valuable time was wasted and useful measures held up for the mere fun of the thing. Comfortable elderly gentlemen as most of them were,

they submitted, with curses not loud but deep, to pass the long night watches yawning and tramping through the division lobbies, because a few indefatigable Irishmen had developed a taste for all-night sittings.

And yet there were times when even they could not forbear to laugh at their own discomfiture. Such a time, for instance, as when the outrageous Biggar chose to sand-bag an excellent measure brought forward by Squire Chaplin, of Sleaford, for facilitating the use of threshing machines. Chaplin was one of the best known and best loved men in the country, a sportsman—had he not won the Derby with Hermit, in a snowstorm, against 100 to 1 odds?—a model landlord, and a great gentleman famed for an elaborate and slightly ponderous courtesy worthy of Sir Charles Grandison. In order to massacre that innocent measure, Mr. Biggar must needs talk about threshing machines for a solid half-hour. He knew nothing about them. He started, with magnificent assurance, by objecting, at some length, to the time of the House being wasted on such a subject, he then went on to darken counsel by words without knowledge concerning the relative advantages of horse power and steam power for threshing. But even so he had only exhausted half his time. It seemed impossible that even he could last the course. But—to borrow the account of a fellow Irishman, Mr. Hugh O'Donnell—"the drooping head became errect, the Belfast Doric rose in inspiration on the midnight air. 'Mr. Speaker, sur, I may be blamed for bein' too conservative, but when all this fuss is made about threshin' machines, I ask myself, and I ask the House, "what can honestly be said against the good old flail?"'"[1] This was too much. From the Speaker downwards, the whole

[1] *A History of the Irish Parliamentary Party*, by F. H. O'Donnell, Vol. I, pp. 229–31.

House, with the exception of poor bewildered Mr. Chaplin, was in convulsions, while Mr. Biggar continued to enlarge on the merits and antiquity of the "good old flail", sinking back at last, with a rapturous expression, into the arms of his colleagues, his task of destruction fulfilled.

But Biggar was too grotesque a comedian to play the part of a Moses. That was reserved for the icy and aristocratic Parnell, who was quick to see the possibilities that lay in the use of this new weapon of obstruction, and who was a born leader of men. In a few years he had risen from being a nervous and tongue-tied recruit—"a bloody fool of a candidate" one of the leaders had called him—to being, first the leader or dictator of the Irish party in Parliament, and afterwards the "Uncrowned King of Ireland". One of the secrets of his power was the inhuman ruthlessness with which it was exercised. Poor Butt, whose life and fortune had been devoted to his country's service, was thrust contemptuously aside to die, a ruined and a broken-hearted man. The decencies of Parliamentary life were trampled underfoot; "the best club in Europe" was degenerating into chaos. The press was scandalized; the immense majority of Parnell's fellow members viewed his conduct with open disgust; John Bull hardened his heart and was less inclined than ever to let the Irish go out of the Union. But Parnell could afford to snap his fingers at English opinion. He had his eyes fixed upon Ireland, and to Ireland the report of his proceedings brought the dawn of a new hope. A patriot had arisen who was capable of putting up a fight against the all-conquering Saxon. The Irish Party, which had hitherto counted for less than nothing, had taken the offensive within the sacred walls of Parliament.

If there was knockabout farce at Westminster, in Ireland there was tragedy. The terrible harvests at

the end of the seventies had, in England, played havoc with rent-rolls. To Ireland they had brought failure of the potato crop, and starvation that threatened to renew the horrors of the Black Famine. Peasants all over the country found themselves unable to find the means of filling their bellies, much less of paying their rent. The landlords had no mercy. Tenants who could not pay could not expect the privilege of starving beneath a roof. The statistics of eviction tell their own tale. "For the five years", says Herbert Paul, "which ended in 1877, the average number of these processes in each year was five hundred. In 1878 it exceeded seven hundred. In 1879 it was a thousand; and the first half of 1880 exceeded the whole year 1879. So far as appearance could be trusted", comments this English historian, "the landlords were taking advantage of hard times to clear their estates."[1] Certain patriots, notably the peasant-born Michael Davitt, into whose soul had entered the iron of a long and probably unjust sentence of imprisonment, were already beginning to form plans for clearing Ireland's soil of her English garrison. It was with this ultimate object in view that he founded the Land League, for the immediate purpose of sustaining the cause of the tenant farmer. The possibilities of an offensive on the land, as well as in Parliament, were not likely to be lost on Parnell. "It will take an earthquake", he was told, "to settle the land question." The reply was characteristic. "Then we must have an earthquake."[2]

It was after the election of 1880 that Parnell was called to the leadership of a compact party of 61 Home Rulers. It was soon evident that of all the troubles that had fallen to the share of Gladstone's ministry, the worst was that constituted by the

[1] *A History of Modern England*, Vol. IV, p. 164.
[2] *The Life of Charles Stewart Parnell*, by R. Barry O'Brien, p. 139.

earthquake in Ireland, which Parnell had desired to see, and which was now fairly in operation. The Land League had taken the law into its own hands, and assumed the power not only to forbid payment of rent, but also to make life intolerable, or extinct, for those who resisted its decrees. The venerable Premier, to be sure, had something more than a pill to cure it. He did sincerely desire to make a fair and generous settlement of this Irish Land Question, and the measure that he brought forward, and carried, for securing the "three F's" demanded by the Land League, to wit, fixity of tenure, fair rent, and freedom of sale, was, considering the state of contemporary opinion, an astonishingly courageous effort to redress the tenant's grievances. But Gladstone's power to deal comprehensively with the land was seriously handicapped by the House of Lords, which on this issue was minded to function quite frankly as a House of Landlords, and which, though it did not dare to persist in its intention to wreck the Land Act, had previously added fuel to the fires of discord by rejecting one providing the tenant with compensation for disturbance.

But no measure that the Government could conceivably have proposed would have had a chance of appeasing Ireland's discontent, so long as the Act of Union remained unrepealed, or the English landlords kept their grip on Irish soil. The situation had got completely out of hand. All over Catholic Ireland the Land League was creating a reign of terror. Centuries of oppression had fostered a cold and ruthless implacability. Not even the animals were spared in a warfare that was the more horrible because it was secret, and masked under the forms of peace. Assassination might be the fate of anyone hardy enough to disregard the League's ukases, and it was not the murderer who would be reprobated, but anyone—even, as in one notorious instance, the

victim's daughter—who might imperil the murderer's skin by giving information against him. Parnell himself was sincerely opposed to such methods of violence. The way that he proposed was that of complete social ostracism, called from the name of the land-agent to whom it was first applied, the boycott.

Gladstone was sincerely anxious to deal generously with Ireland, but neither he nor his government were prepared to tolerate the methods of the Land League. If it was to be war, open or secret, the challenge would be taken up. The answer to terror was martial law, or, as it was called in Ireland, coercion. It was hopeless to rely on the ordinary forms of law. So far as an Irish jury was concerned, it was as safe to shoot a landlord as a sparrow. Accordingly the unedifying spectacle was presented to the world of a Liberal administration setting aside all the forms of constitutional liberty, and governing by the sword, or rather the rifle. Anyone whom the authorities chose to suspect was liable to be clapped into jail without trial. Even Parnell was lodged for a few months in Kilmainham prison. When asked who would take his place, he replied, ominously, "Captain Moonlight."

For one moment there seemed a gleam of hope, when Parnell was released on the understanding—negotiated through Captain O'Shea, who had only the year before, in the capacity of injured husband, challenged him to a duel—that in consideration of a Bill dealing with arrears of rent, the "Uncrowned King" should call off the No Rent Campaign. But any hopes of peace were shattered by an appalling tragedy. There was a group of nationalist desperadoes calling themselves the Invincibles, who were determined to carry the policy of ruthlessness to lengths from which Parnell himself shrank. The newly appointed Irish Secretary, Lord Frederick

Cavendish, walked out in the cool of a May evening into Phœnix Park, and joined the Permanent Under-Secretary, Mr. Burke. The Invincibles had been determined, for some time, to make an end of Mr. Burke, and they were waiting for him. It is said that one of them had whiled away the time by watching a polo match. Quite publicly, in the open highway, Mr. Burke was stabbed, and finished off by having his throat cut as he lay on the ground. Lord Frederick was quite unknown to the murderers, but since he tried to go to his companion's aid with his umbrella, he had to be finished off as well. Then the little band of patriots, having done their bit for Ireland and, no doubt, having also enjoyed themselves in their simple way, drove quietly and unmolested off into the dark.

The horror and indignation aroused by this act rendered vain any prospect of conciliation. It might have been argued that death by stabbing is at least no worse than death by starvation, but human nature does not react in that way. One note was struck that was less human than divine. Poor, bereaved Lady Frederick wrote to the Lord Lieutenant, to say that she could give up even her husband, if his death were to work good to his fellow men. When these words were read, by the priest, to a congregation in Connemara, the people fell spontaneously on to their knees. But this appeal for Christian forbearance had no more effect in calming inflamed passions than Edith Cavell's "there must be no hatred or bitterness to anyone". The strong arm must prevail.

Even Parnell's resolution was daunted. That man of ice and iron had not counted on such ruthlessness as this. He even conveyed to Gladstone his willingness to retire from Parliament. But the Invincibles were only applying, with brutal logic, principles to which Parnell—and not Parnell only, but all of the

new realist school of statesmen throughout Europe—were committed. They were nationalists, with no higher ideal than that of identifying their own with their country's egotism, and playing her hand against the world. The Invincibles had been ready to jeopardize their lives, and they did actually forfeit them. Even the devil has his army of martyrs. And from their own standpoint of devilish patriotism, their deaths are not always in vain. It was the shot fired at Serajevo that caused the dream of a greater Serbia to be fulfilled. We have compared the policy of Parnell with that of Moses, but Pharaoh's resolution was not finally broken till every home in Egypt contained a corpse. The Phœnix Park murders were *the greatest of all possible* advertisements for Ireland's demands. And when the first fury had subsided, many Englishmen began to ask whether so acute and chronic a nuisance as that constituted by an insurgent Ireland ought not to be ended at almost any cost.

Coercion settled nothing. The equivalent of Newton's third law of motion came into play; to every action from above there was an equal and opposite reaction from below. Short of extermination—which had gone out of fashion since the days of Elizabeth and Cromwell—there is no way of conquering national aspirations by force. Like Poland and Bohemia and Finland, Ireland strained at her bonds, and dreamed of the inevitable hour when they should be frayed to breaking-point—or perhaps cut by some foreign sword. But she was in a better case than any of these countries, because John Bull's honest efforts to reconcile conquest with freedom made it certain that he would one day find it in Ireland's power to confront him with the choice between Home Rule and constitutional deadlock.

That time was rapidly approaching. Gladstone made a desperate effort to retrieve the waning for-

tunes of his Government by conferring the franchise on the labouring class in the rural districts. This was so far successful that in the general election of 1885 the strange spectacle was witnessed of a Tory success in the boroughs being nullified by the defection of the counties. But Gladstone's Act had applied to Ireland too, and put the power of the franchise completely into the hands of a peasantry now fiercely and solidly united in the national cause. Accordingly Parnell was returned to Parliament at the head of a perfectly disciplined force of 86 voting units. And this force was just enough, when united with the Tories, to hold the balance. Neither party could hold office except by Parnell's leave, and on Parnell's terms.

What was to be done? The Tories were in office, but Home Rule was so directly contrary to all their professed principles that it seemed impossible they could stomach it. Nevertheless their Irish Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, always a wayward colleague, did put out some feelers to Parnell, though it does not seem as if his leader, Lord Salisbury, was ever seriously prepared to toe the line. But now Gladstone had come to the most astonishing decision of his career. He would dish the Tories and cut the Irish knot by a dramatic surrender of the Union. The "Uncrowned King" should king it over a Parliament on College Green, and Gladstone would keep his comfortable majority at Westminster. Parnell, having thus captured the more powerful of the English parties for Home Rule, accepted the concession without emotion and without gratitude, as a first instalment of his country's emancipation. But, of course, he at once, in the capacity he had now assumed as Uncrowned King of England, gave the necessary orders to his following for the dismissal of Her Majesty's Ministers and the recall of Her Majesty's *bête noire*, Gladstone, to carry out, not her orders,

but those of a potential rebel whom Gladstone himself had described as marching through rapine to the dismemberment of her empire.

Gladstone's new policy, however conveniently for his own purpose its adoption may have been timed, was more in accord with his Liberal principles than the coercion for which his name and authority had stood during the past five years. It may have been as natural for the Tory, Salisbury, to pin his faith to twenty years of firm government, as it had been for George III to deal with the American colonies on the principle that "rebels must be made to obey". But the spectacle of the Prophet of Midlothian applying martial law to a Christian people struggling to be free was too grotesque to be permanent.

If it had been a straight issue between freedom and coercion, the choice, for any Liberal, would have been obvious. But unfortunately it was not a straight issue. We have already seen something of Gladstone's fatal tendency to ignore things in which he did not happen to be interested. As he had ignored the Transvaal in 1880, so, in 1886, he ignored another community of dour Calvinists in the North-East of Ireland, a community fiercely hostile to the Catholic majority that looked to Parnell as its temporal and Leo XIII as its spiritual head. The effect of conferring freedom on the whole of Ireland by the grant of representative institutions would be to bring these Ulster Protestants into what they themselves considered a state of abject slavery to a race they despised. A Parliament in which they were bound to be permanently voted down had no very obvious advantages for them over any other form of tyranny. Their situation would be precisely similar to that of Catholic Ireland under the Union, and every argument put forward for Home Rule applied equally to the Protestant part of Ulster's right to determine its own destinies. Home Rule that included the whole

of Ireland in its scope was a monstrously, and ought to have been an obviously, impossible solution of the Irish problem.

It was a supreme opportunity for wise and judicious statesmanship. But what chance of statesmanship was there in the Parliament of 1886? A number of causes had been tending to lower the standards of Parliamentary life. The Caucus principle had now been fairly adopted by both parties, and the word Parliament was tending to become more and more of a misnomer. The House at Westminster had become less a place where questions of national importance were debated on their merits, than a battlefield where disciplined armies contended with votes instead of bullets. This tendency had been incalculably strengthened by the tactics of the Irish Party, which to gain its own national ends, had upset the old conventions and decencies of debate, and compelled the executive to arm itself with constantly increasing powers of reducing discussion to a farce and forcing through measures by sheer dint of lobby-tramping. If England had presented Ireland with the terms "coercion" and "suspect", Ireland retaliated by saddling Parliament with the "gag" and the "guillotine".

The spirit of the new age was very different from that of mid-century Liberalism. Idealism, based on free discussion, was giving place to realism, based upon force. The process of change may have been less advanced in England than on the Continent, but it was palpably at work. Even the staid ranks of the Tory party were affected by it. During the early eighties, four influential young members had deliberately set themselves to liven up Parliamentary procedure by fighting the Party battle *à outrance*, and without any sort of restraint or scruple. The most prominent of them was Lord Randolph Churchill, a wealthy and cynical man about town, scarcely better

educated than Parnell, who took up politics in the same spirit that others of his class took up sport. The Fourth Party may not have done as much as they imagined for Toryism, to judge at any rate by the results of the '85 election, but they helped on, though with less excuse than Parnell, the work of bringing Parliament into disrepute. Their cruel persecution of Sir Stafford Northcote, their leader in the House, because his ways were not their ways, almost certainly helped to shorten that able and inoffensive gentleman's life. Lord Randolph's cock-sparrow defiance and persistent baiting of Gladstone—"an old man in a hurry" was one of his epithets—was hardly a more edifying spectacle. Among the most unbelievable scandals of modern times was the practical disfranchisement of the Borough of Northampton, by the refusal of Parliament to allow its elected Member, Charles Bradlaugh, either to take his Parliamentary oath, or substitute an affirmation, on the ground that he was an atheist. Lord Randolph's persecuting zeal is only paralleled in the records of cynicism by that of the infidel Bolingbroke against Occasional Conformity and Nonconformist schism. But, as one devout partisan put it to his fellow members, he supposed they all had a God of some kind.

With a Parliament actuated by such principles it was hopeless to expect that one of the most delicate and difficult questions that had ever confronted British statesmanship would be faced in a statesmanlike spirit. By Gladstone's policy, the existence of two nations in Ireland was ignored. The Tories disregarded the existence of even one. The crisis offered a golden opportunity to party tacticians, and the opportunity was joyfully seized. If Gladstone forgot the Protestants, Lord Randolph saw what a winning card their grievance was to play, and with criminal recklessness of consequences he fanned the

already inflamed passions of the North-East with the slogan, "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right."

Gladstone's Home Rule Bill, which was the price of Parnell's support, was duly introduced, and its effect was to split the Liberal party from top to bottom. The intensely conservative aristocracy of the great Whig Houses, headed by Lord Hartington, had long acted as a brake on their leader's progressive activities—which was why the Queen had fought so hard for Lord Hartington as her Prime Minister. It was only natural that these should rally to the maintenance of things as they were, and join their natural allies of the Right. But what decided the issue against Gladstone was the defection of his extreme left wing, headed by Chamberlain. The ex-Mayor of Birmingham was too much a man of the new age ever to get on comfortably with Gladstone. His mind's eye was already turning towards vistas of boundless empire, a Pan-Britannic federation of which Catholic Ireland—and Ulster too—might be members. He was only ready to accept Home Rule as part of such a scheme. Against mere separation he was adamant. So with a courage that he never lacked, he sacrificed what appeared to be the certainty of being the now aged Gladstone's eventual successor in the Liberal leadership, and retired into the wilderness.

It was after midnight, in early June, that Mr. Gladstone, "almost as white", says Morley, "as the flower in his coat", concluded his final appeal for the measure on which he had set his heart. "Ireland stands at your bar", he told the House, "expectant, hopeful, almost suppliant . . . she asks a blessed oblivion of the past, and in that oblivion our interest is deeper even than hers. . . . Think, I beseech you", he pleaded in conclusion, "think well, think wisely, think, not for the moment, but for the years that are to come, before you reject

this bill." Rejected it was, by a majority of 30, and the constituencies confirmed the verdict by a Unionist majority of 110 over Gladstonians and Irish combined.

But the Irish problem remained further from solution than ever, and though for the moment the *English Pharaoh appeared to have triumphed,* there were yet other plagues in store for him.

CHAPTER IV

MASS SUGGESTION

It was during the eighties that the achievement of universal education began to make its effects decisively felt among the adult population. Even after the passing of Forster's great Act, in 1870, it took some time to create the necessary machinery for educating all the children. But gradually these difficulties were overcome, and every passing year raised the age limit below which all young men and women would be officially educated. Illiteracy was becoming middle-aged; by the end of the century it would be positively senile.

Except to a few disgruntled dowagers, who could not endure the idea of anything calculated to cause their inferiors to forget their station, it scarcely occurred to anybody to doubt that here was an instance of unalloyed progress. Was it not a scandal that, in a nation calling itself civilized, citizens should be walking the streets to whom the letters on shops and hoardings were as mysterious as Chinese characters, and to whom the morning paper was a white sheet covered with unintelligible markings? And when these illiterates became voters, was it not something worse than a scandal? No doubt it was, but there was another side to the picture. The achievement of compulsory literacy had created an enormously increased opportunity for the arts of mass suggestion as practised by the advertiser, the newspaper proprietor, and the political boss.

A new view of mankind was coming into vogue, the very opposite to that of the mid-century Liberal with his trust in the people and his belief in free discussion.

Far from worshipping the crowd, the realists of the new [illegible]. A new [illegible], that depe[illegible]tion, had been applied to politics even before the passing of the Education Act. Joseph Chamberlain, the Radical Mayor of Birmingham, with one or two able associates, had implemented his version of democracy by organizing the voters into a drilled and disciplined army, only instead of calling the organizing body a general staff, it was christened by the American name of Caucus, an invention that was destined to revolutionize political, as that of gunpowder had revolutionized national, war. The free and independent elector was transformed into a voting unit, nor was even his representative, when elected, any more than the obedient tool of his superiors. The Caucus had no more tolerance for liberty of speech or action than the Holy Office.

By the middle of the eighties, the Birmingham model had been adopted, in principle, by each of the two great political parties, and democracy had become a polite name for caucocracy. But Chamberlain, in founding the Caucus, had been playing not for his own hand, but, as he sincerely believed, for those of his country and fellow-citizens. Mass suggestion—outside the field of politics—was seldom applied from any more exalted motive than that of turning a more or less honest penny. The commonest form was that practised by the commercial advertiser, who had already for centuries been plying his conspicuous but undistinguished calling. The Bull and Mouth on the tavern sign-board, the cry of Sweet Lavender echoing through streets of timber-built houses, were the inoffensive forebears of the sky-sign and the landscape-killer. No sooner had the first newsheets begun to make their appearance, than the quack and the merchant employed them in the capacity of megaphones.

By the middle of the nineteenth century advertising was in full swing; the walls, the hoardings, even the pavements and bridges of the metropolis, bawled to the passer-by the trader's candid appreciation of his own wares.

The art of applying psychology to commerce was still immature during the seventies. The advertiser of those days lacked the incisiveness and resource that are the fruit of Transatlantic enterprise. There is an old-world ring about such set-piece poems as one advertising a dentifrice in the *Graphic* of 1879, of which the following is a stanza:

> I have heard a strange statement, dear Fanny, to-day,
> That the reason that teeth do decay
> Is traced to some objects that form in the gums,
> And eat them in time quite away.
> Animalcules, they say, are engendered, that is
> If the mouth is not healthy and clean,
> And I also have heard to preserve them, the best
> Is the fragrant, the sweet Floriline.

The advertiser was the first to profit from the effects of compulsory literacy. His progress was continuous. He had already invaded the realms of art, and in 1885 the great Millais became, by purchase, a propagandist of soap. But though commercial advertisement was of all forms of mass suggestion the most universally pervasive, it had the least immediate effect on the national mentality, though its influence in the long run was probably far from negligible. The habit of accepting uncritically anything, however preposterous on the face of it, that is presented with sufficient emphasis or repetition, is as sure a method as can be imagined of inducing mental helplessness. The dupe of the patent medicine vendor will be equally the dupe of the political or editorial cheapjack. This is not to deny the part played by advertisement as the midwife of commerce. But what is good for the pocket is not necessarily good for the soul, and the

question of the effects and desirable limits of publicity is worthy of more serious investigation than it has hitherto received.

Though, as time went on and circulation increased, the newspapers and magazines came to be more and more dependent on the rent of their advertisement columns, it was not by frank and open advertisement that the public mind was most powerfully influenced. Long before everybody was capable of reading, the Press had come to be dubbed the Fourth Estate of the Realm. The attitude towards it of the mid-century Liberal is shown by the way in which duties on newspapers and even advertisements were christened Taxes on Knowledge. That knowledge, and even wisdom, were gifts of the printed sheet, was assumed as a matter of course.

Such was the spirit by which at least the more important organs had been inspired. The heads of the Fourth Estate took their responsibilities terribly seriously. There was a dignity, far above that of mere business, that hedged the mid-Victorian editor and his paper. It was written for people with enough leisure and concentration to digest reports of long, set speeches in Parliament, and weigh carefully the pros and cons before pronouncing a verdict. The leaders were weighty and long-drawn-out, without any trumpeting of headlines. Indeed, any open attempt to solicit the attention of the reader would have been severely frowned upon. *The Times* itself, under the proprietorship of the third of a dynasty of John Walters, was not much easier than Bradshaw to find one's way about in. But then *The Times* was of such world-wide authority that it did not need to bother about the niceties of systematic arrangement. It was typically Victorian in its self-important individualism. Of the reigning Walter, a portentous magnate of forbidding manners, a biographer[1] records that "he

[1] J. R. Thursfield, in *The Dictionary of National Biography*.

spoke with gravity, as became one who directly or indirectly had made more public opinion than any man of his time . . . and he always regarded his relation to *The Times* as a matter for which he would answer only to his own conscience."

Self-respect, and respect for the reader, were thus the foundations of the best mid-Victorian journalism. But papers like *The Times* commanded a comparatively small public of educated persons. And now a new multitude of potential readers was demanding to be catered for. Vast profits awaited the bold adventurer who could find out what this public wanted, or could be induced to want, with a view to supplying it.

The bright idea first occurred to a certain George Newnes, branch manager in Manchester for a fancy goods business. "It was he", says Sir Max Pemberton, "who first perceived that the Education Acts of the sixties had created a vast public, which had no use for high-brow literature, but were very much in need of light and instructive literature—the kind of people who picked out the 'tit bits' from the ordinary newspapers, and let the rest go hang."[1] Newnes is said to have been first inspired by reading in an evening paper about a runaway engine, started by some children, that had been eventually brought to a standstill. This was a tit-bit. Why not, he asked his wife. a magazine consisting entirely of tit-bits? He had no capital for the adventure, but he had brains enough to raise it by starting, and stunting, a vegetarian restaurant. *Tit Bits* was the title of his magazine which, from its first appearance in 1881, was an overwhelming success. It might equally well have served as a title for the new journalism of which Newnes was the pioneer.

For the essence of the tit bit is that it can be received by the reader without the least necessity for concentration. It has the effect on the mind of a slight and

[1] *Tit Bits Jubilee Book*, p. 115.

agreeable stimulus. It may even satisfy a certain craving for knowledge, but it is knowledge of the kind that enters at one ear and departs at the other, because if it were to be received into the mind and co-ordinated with other knowledge, the demon concentration would have to be invoked, and that, at all costs, is to be avoided. Among the half-educated, there is an immense demand for casual but exact snippets of information, such as the combined length of all the sewers in England or the number of pints of beer that would fill the dome of St. Paul's. In the same way a few snappy lines about a dancing centenarian in Mexico City or the Wimbledon dowager who devoured her pug may elicit, from the jaded reader, a satisfied "Gaw!" or "My!" on its way to oblivion.

It must not be imagined that the new journalism sprang, helmeted and armed, like Athene, from the brain of Newnes. The *Tit Bits* of the eighties fell a long way short of the sensationalism that was to follow. According to his lights, Newnes was a conscientious and high-principled man. But as he himself admitted to his old schoolfellow Mr. W. T. Stead: "There is one kind of journalism which directs the affairs of nations; it makes and unmakes cabinets, it upsets Governments, builds up Navies and does many other great things . . . it is your journalism. There is another kind of journalism which . . . is content to plod on, year after year, giving wholesome and harmless entertainment to crowds of hard-working people craving for a little fun and amusement. . . . That is my journalism."[1] Newnes did try his hand at daily journalism, but he was quite out of his element, and the experiment was not a success.

It was a year before Newnes launched *Tit Bits* that Stead came up to London to act as assistant editor to

[1] *The Life of W. T. Stead*, by Frederic Whyte, Vol. I, p. 320.

John Morley on the staff of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and three years later he succeeded to the editorship. It was he who introduced the new methods into the more serious type of journalism, and thus may be said to have started a veritable revolution in the Fourth Estate. And yet Stead was decidedly more a man of the old age than of the new. He was not, like George Newnes and Alfred Harmsworth, first and foremost a tradesman, out to make a fortune by supplying the most extensive possible market. His business ideas were primitive; he was not greatly interested in the making of money, and he died a comparatively poor man. He was a prophet, an evangelist, a man with a message, or rather a score of messages, and his journal was his pulpit. He resembled Gladstone in being able to lash himself into a fever of infectious enthusiasm for any cause that the spirit moved him to adopt. He anticipated the discovery of Mr. Hearst's secret of journalism—"get excited when the public is excited." Only with Stead, the excitement was perfectly genuine, and usually preceded that of the public. It was his nature to be perpetually excited; it is impossible to conceive of him as reflecting calmly or dispassionately about anything.

On the old codgers of the fifties and sixties, sitting in their clubs beneath the weight of their toppers and heavily digesting the day's news, such methods would have been thrown away. They did not believe in getting excited about anything, except perhaps the deficiencies or delays of the club dinner. But the new public was an excitable public. It had no more desire than Stead himself to ruminate over its news. What it wanted was stimulus, and under the influence of such stimulus it was liable to get out of control and do serious damage.

One of the first things about which Stead, when he had no longer the rationalist Morley to put a curb on

his emotion, got excited, was the Sudan, and it was largely—though how largely is open to dispute—by dint of his agitation that the Government was induced to send out Gordon, whose spirit was so strangely akin to that of Stead. Next the country was successfully panicked about the state of the Navy, and the effect of Stead's campaign was to secure a considerable addition of ships and expenditure of public money.

But the most famous of all his journalese stunts was associated with the reform of the law relating to sexual vice. For Stead was by upbringing and nature a Puritan, and, as is common with Puritans, the subject of sexual relations excited him more than any other. There was a curious streak of grossness in his composition that justifies the judgment of Mr. Havelock Ellis that but for his stern self-control, he would have been quite a debauched person. With a fascinated horror he set himself to explore and expose the darkest secrets of the underworld. His series of articles in the *Pall Mall* was welcomed not only by ardent reformers like General Booth and George Bernard Shaw, but by all amateurs of the salacious. They evoked a roar of indignation from that great body of respectable persons who could tolerate the festering of any wound provided it were not indecently exposed. Not only England, but the whole civilized world, rang with the fame of Stead's exposures.

He capped all his other performances by staging a drama that constituted a masterpiece of publicity. By way of proving his assertions, he got himself up in the incongruous rôle of Don Juan, purchased a girl of 13 from her parents, got her taken to a house of ill-fame, entered her bedroom, and then, having got her at his mercy, delivered her over, a *virgo intacta*, to the Salvation Army. To his immense delight, the State itself consented to figure in the next act of the drama. Stead was brought before a judge on a

technical charge, was duly sentenced to a three months' stretch, which, after one unpleasant night on a plank bed, took the form of a much-needed rest-cure in the First Division. He was quite melancholy, he said, at the prospect of leaving jail, but he emerged victorious, with his crusade won. The Criminal Law Amendment Bill was carried to the Statute Book on a surge of popular indignation, and the age of consent raised from thirteen to sixteen. It was a triumph for the new journalism, but it was equally a triumph for Stead's personality and principles.

He had started a revolution that was destined to transform the Fourth Estate of the Realm. But the coming leaders of that revolution were to be men of very different calibre from that of the dreamer and idealist. If they influenced public opinion, it was not with Stead's object of making righteousness prevail or robbing the Minotaur of his prey, but simply and solely of increasing circulation. They were too shrewd to cramp their business style by binding themselves, like Stead, to one set of principles. They were realists, with a single eye to the main chance, and were determined to make the utmost use of mass-suggestion in its pursuit. By the end of the eighties, the young Alfred Harmsworth had challenged the supremacy of *Tit Bits* in its chosen field of entertainment, by launching the almost equally popular *Answers*, and was already beginning to turn his thoughts in the direction of daily journalism, while in America, Pulitzer was justifying the new methods by the success of his New York *World*, and William Randolph Hearst was experimenting on the same lines by the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW BOURGEOISIE

We have already mentioned Charles Keene and George Du Maurier, those two great black-and-white artists who, apart from Tenniel and his cartoons, carried *Punch* on their shoulders during the eighties. The chief function of each was to depict the humours of British middle-class life. There was only eleven years between the dates of their births and yet the two would seem to have lived in two wholly different worlds. To the day of his death Keene saw the middle class that Matthew Arnold had trounced and Dickens immortalized. The figure to which Keene's pencil was irresistibly attracted was that of the old cove or codger or buffer of mid-Victorian times, the speaking likeness of Arnold's representative Philistine, Mr. Bottles. But it is not as a Philistine that the old buffer regards himself, or is regarded by his creator. He is sufficient unto himself, and in his slightly pompous self-sufficiency the humour of him resides. But with Du Maurier's Sir Pompey Bedell, Sir Gorgius Midas, Mrs. Cimabue Brown and Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns, the humour consists in the fact that they are palpably insufficient unto themselves, and striving to impose themselves on others in parts that they are unqualified to play. Du Maurier's bourgeoisie is class conscious, in the same sense that Adam and Eve were body-conscious after the Fall; that of Keene takes its class as a matter of course, and does not dream of being ashamed of it. And there is this further difference. The society depicted by Keene is frankly and unmistakably

middle class, of that by Du Maurier you never quite know on which side of the border to place it, or indeed whether there is any definite border at all.

Most of us have indulged in the fascinating occupation of turning over the leaves of old *Punches*, and are consequently familiar with pretty, clever, intriguing, pushing Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns, and her jaded husband with the walrus moustache, who hangs inconspicuously about at the ultra-smart parties he has had to finance. What is Ponsonby? and how has he raised that income above which he is probably living? Not, I think, after the manner of Sir Gorgius Midas, who probably started as a grocer's lad and has worked up to the position of a Lipton or a Whiteley. Ponsonby has the appearance of having been always more or less genteel—he probably hails from one of the less distinguished public schools. He has none of the awful dignity of Sir Pompey Bedell, who is beyond doubt a city merchant, and probably a sheriff or an alderman, with a house in Bayswater—a club acquaintance, though hardly an intimate, of Jolyon Forsyte. On the whole I should be inclined to wager that Ponsonby has made a rather precarious fortune on the Stock Exchange, and that his worried look is at least partly due to the necessity of continual speculation in order to keep pace with his wife's social demands.

One wonders what Matthew Arnold would hav made of the de Tomkynses. They were undoubtedl middle class in origin if not in ambition, but anythin more different from Mr. Bright and Mr. Roebuck would have been difficult to imagine. Mr. Brig thought far too much of his status as mill-owner imagine he could better it by inveigling a Duche past his doors. But the de Tomkynses had none the stubborn Philistine pride of the middle-cla Radical, the pride that Arnold had satirized. M de Tomkyns—for Ponsonby's tastes did not matter

was a friend of æsthetes and a patroness of virtuosos, and she would as soon have been identified with the great middle class as with Mrs. Warren's profession. Like Sir Thomas More—only substituting the word "class" for "country"—she could have truthfully said that her class was not that from which she came, but that to which she went.

She first appears in the seventies. Earlier, she would not have had a chance of being received—a Duchess of the sixties would as soon have thought of entering into social relations with her milliner. But in the eighties, when Mrs. de Tomkyns is at her zenith, the barriers are no longer rigidly exclusive. Money is beginning to assert its claims to a place in the sun. The task of the climber, though difficult, is by no means hopeless. And thus begins a process of social transformation whose effects, whether we are to judge them good or evil, are certainly of importance. For the great middle class, that had ruled the roost between the first two Reform Bills, was in process of being replaced by something totally different, and indeed the time was foreshadowed when the distinction between "middle" and "upper" would be so far obliterated that to apply the term "middle class" to anyone whatever would be decidedly injudicious.

Whether the bourgeoisie may be deemed to have triumphed must remain a matter of opinion. No doubt the tendency was to establish the right of everyone, with money enough to do so, to be addressed as Esquire and enter the charmed circle of upper-class society. But it is a question whether the newcomers entered as conquerors into a besieged stronghold, or as worshippers admitted to a shrine. The old-fashioned Radical may not have been admitted to the Duke's society, but he was capable of standing up to the Duke, and indeed was apt to take an austere pleasure in defying him and his class. He had his

wn standards, his conventions and respectabilities, hat might be Philistine, but were at least his own. Why should he stoop to imitation, when in every department of intellectual and creative activity the bourgeoisie provided the pick of the leaders?

Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns had her own answer to this question. To her, the door of the ducal mansion might have been that guarded by St. Peter, so eager was she to enter in. Ever since the days of Gainsborough and Romney, a glamour of romance had invested aristocratic society in England. What was called snobbery was founded on the belief that the life beautiful was really attainable by those who were received into "Society" or the "County."

There was a romantic faith in the artistocrat as a being superior, physically, intellectually, and culturally, to folk of common clay. Ouida, with her beautiful, ruthless guardsmen, gave the crudest and most popular expression to this belief, but it is voiced in practically all the fashionable fiction of the time, and even George Meredith cannot be acquitted of inventing an upper-class society to reflect his own brilliancy. As for Oscar Wilde, one would imagin from some of his writings that handles were attache to names for the purpose of grinding epigrams o of their owners. So that loving the highest wh we see it became much the same thing as lovi a lord.

As first one old family estate and then another ca into the market, and was bought up by somebod business, it might have seemed as if the Philistines conquered the Barbarians. And sometimes the chaser might indeed be a self-made man with tough independence of his upbringing. But his who had probably been to Eton or Harrow, an not fond of hearing Dad referred to as "th Radical bounder up on the hill who shoots f would be particularly anxious to secure recogni

doing and being all that was expected of a gentleman in his position. The "county" was not yet driven to making that recognition cheap—lavish expenditure and rigid conformity were what it exacted. It was easiest of all to enter the charmed circle by the political door. The support of a great landowner or employer of labourer for the party was of such vital importance, that a few dropped bricks or aitches could well be overlooked.

The formation of the Primrose League in 1881 is a landmark in social evolution. The idea may have been suggested by the Young England Movement of forty years before, but the League, with its romantic fellowship of knights and dames, was more definitely aimed at roping the middle class into the Conservative fold. It acted as a continual means of suggestion that there was only one party for ladies and gentlemen, and that a Radical (a term pretty impartially applied to anyone not a Conservative) was an outsider, capable of almost any iniquity, and certainly not the kind of person that anybody could leave cards on. This feeling was greatly strengthened when, following the lead of Lord Hartington, most of the great Whig families broke away from a Liberalism that, under Gladstone's leadership, seemed to be developing dangerously democratic tendencies.

It was in the Home Counties, on which the *nouveaux riches* had made the greatest inroads, that the swing to the right was most pronounced. In outlying districts, such as Devonshire and Cornwall, the balance was more evenly maintained, since families rooted to the soil for many generations had little temptation to achieve social merit by altering their traditional politics.

Thus the fall in the value of land and the coming of democracy had the strange sequel of making the country districts into strongholds of Toryism. The power of the individual magnate was certainly not

what it had been, but that of the "county" collectively was absolute. One has to have lived in a country district to realize the enormous solemnity attached to such nice points as whether the doctor of a lunatic asylum was on exactly the same footing as the local G.P., whether an athletic fruit-grower who had not quite "arrived" might yet be asked to a mixed hockey match with tea in the house, and on what principles garden parties were to be arranged, one for the real "county", and one for the people, mostly from the local market town, to whom civility had to be shown once a year, but whom Sir Guy and Lady Mumblefever could certainly not be asked to meet.

The competition for advancement was too keen to leave any scope for the old Victorian individualism. There was no arguing with Lady Mumblefever. Either she recognized you, and there was an end of it, or she didn't, and there was an end of you. The least deviation from conformity would settle the business. If for example you were known to harbour humanitarian objections to the sacred ritual of hunting, or—at the time of which we are writing—failed to rent and occupy a family pew, you would be showing the cloven hoof. On the other hand, every country district could show a number of families that had glided silently and humbly into the pale, and kept there by making themselves inconspicuously useful to her Ladyship and her peers. People used to remark of them that they could remember the time when old So-and-so, the paterfamilias, was nothing at all.

If the counties were prolific of safe seats for Toryism, so to an even greater extent were those suburban districts known as residential. Here was no county set to dictate the standards, except in those most outlying districts where a few old-established families towered, like ancient oaks, above a mushroom population of city-goers. But the tyranny of genteel standards was all the greater from the fact that the Sinai from which

the unwritten law was promulgated remained wrapped in clouds.

It was a new way of life that was being trod in these suburbs, a way whose strangeness is only hidden from us because we are accustomed to take it so much as a matter of course. To the average male, his house, or villa, was only, from Monday to Friday, the place to which he retired to sleep, and consequently his womenfolk were left to kill the time as best they might until he returned in the evening, fatigued with his day's toil and the foul air of two stuffy train journeys. That time must needs want a lot of killing, since servants were easy to procure and the drudgery of the middle-class housewife was a thing of the early Victorian past.

For these womenfolk life must needs be a perpetual struggle against its own monotony. They had not the resources of their sisters, islanded for six months of the year in Indian hill-stations, with a perpetual round of gaiety and a spice of Platonic adultery to sweeten their leisure. Every mistress of one in a row of villas was a member, and might at any moment become the victim, of an inquisition. For the ordinary woman, with few intellectual resources, there was only one way of expanding her personality. She could at least be genteel. She might not, like Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomykns, be able to establish personal contact with the Olympians of Belgravia. But she could make her home and environment as strenuously Belgravian as she knew how.

Dickens, if he had returned to earth only twenty years after his death, would have failed to recognize the old middle class that he had found so prolific of humour and character. His Scrooges, his Nicklebys, his members of the Pickwick Club, were as extinct as the dodo. Instead, he would have looked down upon an endless, level vista of genteel characters, taken, apparently, at second-hand from fashionable three-decker novels supplied by the circulating libraries.

These people were perpetually striving after a life that not one in a thousand of them could ever hope to live. In consequence they had none of the old pride of respectability—they would not have been the ladies and gentlemen they were had they been openly proud of belonging to Ealing, or even Surbiton. Certain districts, like Balham and Upper Tooting, that ranked low in the scale of gentility, came to be hardly ever mentioned except with a humorous implication, and an author like Anstey, when he wanted to notify to his readers that he was dealing with rather absurd people, would give them such names as Brondesbury Brown, Harlesden Smith, Kensal Green, and Ladbrooke Hill.

There was, in fact, among the new middle class, a profound discontent with a life which, in spite of the appearances that everyone was engaged in keeping up, was felt to be unnatural, lacking as it was in scope and dignity. Where this discontent was subconscious, conpensation was sought for in dream and make-believe, partly, as we have seen, in the continual pre-occupation with the doings of "society" and a grown-up version of the nursery game, Lords and Ladies, partly, as we shall see, in a cult of adventure and militarism whose wages might some day be death. Where the revolt was conscious, it would have the effect of providing educated men and women leaders for all sorts of revolutionary movements, political, social, and æsthetic.

CHAPTER VI

WOMEN WHO DID

It is probable that the last three decades of the nineteenth century saw as great a change in the status and psychology of women as had been witnessed in any previous three centuries one could name. We have only to look into that most invaluable mirror of the times constituted by the illustrated press, to realize that the young woman of the *fin-de-siècle* was an utterly different creature from what her mother had been in the mid-century. Whether this change was wholly for the good may perhaps admit of more question than it is prudent, nowadays, to put, but that it was a change, and one going to the very roots of national life, can admit of no question whatever.

The really important thing that had happened was that women—even the youngest—had begun, and were encouraged, to look the world in the face. No doubt the demureness of the mid-Victorian maiden was very largely a pose. But it was a pose that every normal maiden felt it incumbent upon her to adopt. Even her formidable mamma, who may have ruled her husband with a rod of iron, pretended to be a defenceless woman.

But the woman of the nineties is anything but demure. "I met a young girl", says a character in one of Mr. Yeats's plays, "and she had the walk of a queen". That girl might have stood for the figure that every young lady of the nineties aspired to see in her looking-glass. She stood proudly erect with her dress falling in stately folds and trailing like a robe; she regarded would-be swains with an air of

proud condescension; her voice had a rich drawl of conscious superiority. Anything more different from the round-faced Floras depicted by Leech it would be hard to imagine. And yet Flora was there, ample and majestic, with a little black bonnet and a black alpaca dress, regarding these upstart children, through her tortoise-shell lorgnettes, with a scrutiny that had in it less of disapproval than of a faintly amused fatalism.

This indefinable change more than compensated for an outward and measurable progress that must, to champions of women's emancipation, have seemed heart-breaking in its slowness and setbacks. As early as the end of the sixties hopes had run high. Votes for women had already come before Parliament, with the most distinguished backing. John Stuart Mill, the mighty colossus who towered above the intellectual world of his day to an extent difficult for us to realize, had lent the full weight of his authority to the cause, and had gone into Parliament as its whole-hearted champion. A powerful agitation was set on foot, particularly in the industrial North. In 1869 the Municipal Franchise was achieved; in 1870 women were allowed to vote for, and sit on, the newly constituted School Boards. In the same year a Suffrage Bill introduced by Jacob Bright into Parliament passed its second reading, but without being defeated by a fair and square vote, it was shelved by the convenient method of refusing it Parliamentary time—a form of masculine evasion that was to persist for over forty years, and was finally to arouse the militant fury of suffragettes.

Even in the late sixties the agitation for votes had begun to attract a good deal of attention. There is a cartoon[1] depicting a typical gathering of the suffragettes of those times, with their flowing dresses and enormous chignons, and though the accompanying

[1] In *Echoes, Cartoons and Lyrics* (First Series).

rhymster cannot resist a little good-natured chaff, as for instance:

Faith, it will be a pleasant change,
  Instead of male electors' snarlings
Your hustings business to arrange
  With the delightful little darlings,

he ends on a note as friendly to the cause as it is hostile to Mill:

And do not think, O democrat!
  Their votes will strengthen your authority:
Strong-minded ones, thank Heaven for that,
  Are in a very small minority.

Scorning utilitarian chaff,
  They'll vote for loyalty, honour, glory:
You'll find the nation's better half
  Is far less Radical than Tory.

It is not difficult to guess what were the politics of the bard.

Women were advancing in other directions too. Miss Beale, at Cheltenham College, was trying to adapt the boys' public school system to the education of girls, while Bedford and Girton colleges were providing university training for a select few. Attempts were being made to break down the masculine monopoly of the professions, particularly of medicine. There was a brilliant array of women reformers in the public eye, including Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Lydia Becker, Sophia Jex Blake, Madame Bodichon, and Frances Power Cobbe.

But those who had hoped that the walls of Jericho would fall flat at the first blast of the trumpet were reckoning without their solid buttressing of prejudice, a prejudice by no means confined to men. It behoves us to realize that the Victorian philosophy of sex, though very different from that of our own day, was by no means so abjectly foolish as one would gather from modern writings on the subject. The Victorian

papa, terrifying and tyrannizing over his meek and submissive wife and family, is unplausible caricature. But it is true that the Victorians believed quite literally in the sanctity of the family union, and were prepared to maintain that sanctity at any cost to individuals. Women, in their eyes, were the special guardians of the family; their place was consequently in the home, and the early advocates of women's suffrage were frequently greeted with cries bidding them go home and mind the baby.

Woman was the giver of life, she was also the guardian of its refinements and amenities. In consequence, among the middle and upper classes at least, it was designed to keep her out of the hurly-burly of the struggle for existence. Hence the fiction of a delicate, fairy-like creature on whom no wind must be allowed to blow too roughly. Hence too the idea that it was degrading for a lady to go out and earn her own living. It was for her to keep alive those virtues and graces which the sterner sex had no chance of developing. She was gentle, unselfish, a creature of exquisite sensibility. At the same time she had the dangerous and agonizing task of providing the family with fresh members.

For such functions she was specialized, and the Victorians were determined that she should be kept specialized. It was every woman's duty to attract a husband and become the mother of a family. Did she fail in this, she became that despised creature, the old maid. Once she had entered into the bond of union, it was sacrosanct. She has taken her vow at the altar as the soldier takes his at the recruiting depot, for better or for worse, and if under any stress of circumstances she defaults, she is as little deserving of mercy as the deserter on active service. No doubt, where temperaments were incompatible or the husband tyrannous, the wife's powers of endurance might be strained nigh to breaking-point. But even

so, the message of Victorian society to her was like that of Wellington to a commander who sent him a S.O.S. *for reinforcements*: "Tell him to die where he stands." Which may appear a heartless attitude, but can hardly be called sentimental. For it was based upon a belief that permanence is an essential condition of the family union, without which none of its advantages can be safeguarded.

And again, in specializing woman for the family, the Victorians [illegible] ier to fulfil the func [illegible] had intended her. They did not believe that any good purpose would be served by taking her from the home, and sending her out into the world to compete with men, handicapped, as she was, by her sex. They were more inclined to emphasize the difference between the sexes than to ignore it. If woman must needs work, then let it be work for which her sex specially qualified her, that, for instance, of nurse or governess. Let there be division of labour and not competition between Jack and Jill. The family was the Ark of the Victorian Covenant, and it followed that the noblest work of woman was that which she performed in her capacity of its priestess.

The struggle for women's emancipation may have ostensibly been aimed at the vote or the professions, but essentially it was a revolt against the family, or at any rate the Victorian ideal of the family. "The greatness of woman", as we read in an avowedly propagandist account of the movement, "does not necessarily consist in the meek fulfilment of the functions of a wife and mother".[1]

It is possible that the earnest and avowed reformers may have been less influential in the long run than that light-hearted young person to whom we have already had occasion to allude as "the girl of the

[1] *The Emancipation of English Women*, by W. Lyon Blease, p. 142.

d", the predecessor of the modern "bright g thing". For the earnest reformers, though achievement made them respected, attracted to nselves a great deal of ridicule and hostility. The a of a bi-sexual Parliament tickled Mr. Punch's se of humour even more than that of an Irish rliament. The "coming woman" came in for no nd of chaff, and as a crowning extravagance it was tated that one of her feats would be ballooning to New York. Even *Punch* would not have dared to suggest flying to Australia. It must be confessed that many enthusiastic feminists cut grotesque enough figures with the tailor-made semi-masculine costumes and bobbed hair that they had begun to sport in 1874 or thereabouts. No English lady went quite to the length a Miss Brittain, of Boston, Mass., who actually disputed the right of men to the suffrage, on the ground of their being inferior animals, but it cannot be denied that the zeal of the early reformers was sometimes calculated to defeat its own object, even though they included in their rank such charming and essentially womanly women a Josephine Butler.

But despite the censures of Mrs. Lynn Linton a Mrs. Grundy, there was the very reverse of hosti towards "the girl of the period" and her charm naughtiness. It was just because she was consc of having no cause to advance but that of her enjoyment, that she proved so valuable an ally i war of the "coming woman" against the guarding the Victorian family. Where others c liberties, she took them. And being fashional self, she made her liberties fashionable.

The advance, once begun, was continuou thing that had rendered it possible was the p discarding of the bell-shaped figure associ the crinoline, which must have constituted a veto upon fastness of any kind. Ther

attempt to bring it back, at the beginning of the eighties, in the form of the "crinolette", but that was practically still-born. In the seventies, the fashion for demureness had quite passed. The attractive girl was no longer round-faced and innocent-eyed, but pert and frivolous. To judge from the drawings of the time, quite an abnormal number of noses seem to have acquired an upward tilt, and their owners a corresponding boldness of self-assertion. After all, it is a human weakness of artists to draw the most attractive girls they can think of.

Young women were also becoming a good deal more physically virile through their participation in athletics. It is now that ladies—as distinct from half-ladies of the Lucy Glitters and Anonyma type—begin to compete seriously with men, and still more with each other, in the hunting-field. This competitive instinct, in fact, was apt to make them into desperate thrusters, and one has heard of four or five women in succession going out of their way to tackle a perfectly unnecessary jump, for no better reason than that the first had done so. A new type of horsy women began to figure in country houses, with hard hats and even harder dispositions, who, as girls, had been proud to undergo the initiation of having their cheeks befouled with still warm blood of a fox—a thing that would have made tender-hearted Flora swoon. By 1875, we hear of women walking with the guns, and five years later they are actually using them, as we gather from a poem that *Punch* puts into the mouth of a gillie:

> Wimmen's Rechts is vara weel
> Oh, aye!
> For hizzies wha've nae hearts to feel.

Exercise of a less sanguinary nature was also becoming popular among the new generation of young women. There was a sudden craze for roller skating

that, during the winter of 1875–6, acquired the name of "rincomania". How popular were bi-sexual walking tours about this time we have already seen. And in the latter half of the decade, tennis—with the occasional variation of badminton—had arrived, and established itself as the young people's lawn game, the peaceful croquet being abandoned, for the most part, to the seniors. It was tennis of a kind very different from the stern contests of to-day. The ladies held up their skirts with one hand while they wielded the racket with the other. The men played in coats and straw hats—sometimes in bowlers—while stockings and knickerbockers were more common than trousers. Collars and ties were, of course, *de rigueur*, and as late as the early eighties one had heard of a host restraining gentlemen from the indecency of stripping off their coats at his tennis parties.

Strange and even scandalous as it may sound in modern ears, mixed tennis was at first regarded purely in the light of an amusement. There could not, in the nature of things, have been much science, but there was a great deal of excitement and laughter with a strong undercurrent of flirtation. It was a great thing to see how high you could hit the ball into the air. The young ladies certainly thought more of being attractive to their partners than terrible to their opponents.

In the eighties feminine proficiency at tennis was constantly increasing, and though for the majority of women it was still merely a party game, the lady champion was beginning to make a not yet conspicuous appearance. And now golf had begun to claim its fair devotees, and here and there cricket—there was the White Heather Club, for instance, where the game was played with much keenness, and an average of 40 for a season not unknown. All of which is leading up to Gilbert's vision of "the bright and beautiful English girl",

of eleven stone two,
And five foot ten in her dancing shoe,

so very different from anything her mother had aspired to be:

To find mock-modesty, please apply
To the conscious blush and the downcast eye.

To pass from play to work, the influx of women into city offices had hardly yet begun, but we have mention in *Punch* of a new commercial phenomenon, the lady with the bag, applying her feminine arts to the pushing of some line of goods. But the majority of educated woman workers went to swell the teaching and nursing professions.

The new spirit was finding expression in literature. George Meredith, in particular, was not only the conscious advocate of a larger freedom for women but—what was more important—he created women fit to be free. His heroines are charming, not because they are calculated to charm men, but for their own sakes. And yet their charm is of a distinctively feminine kind. No one would dream of characterizing Clara Middleton, or Rhoda Fleming, or Diana of the Crossways, as New Women. But they were, in the heroic sense, heroines, mistresses of their souls working out their destinies from within.

Meredith was not of the stuff of which propagandists are made. His reasoned and recondite presentation of the case for "fair ladies in revolt" attracted considerably less attention than the shrill trumpetings of a South African novelist, Miss Olive Schreiner, who, in 1883, went fairly off the deep end—though it would hardly be out of anybody's depth nowadays—with her *Story of a South African Farm*. Lyndall, the heroine, is one of those alarmingly intense and humourless women who were coming into fashion at this time, and is a megaphone through which the authoress orates at her readers. By a cruelly ingenious piece of

machinery she is provided with a listener in the shape of a youth who is so entirely tongue-tied as to be hardly capable of putting up a dozen words against as many of her paragraphs, and who is credited with such doglike devotion as to remain rooted to the spot, however long she holds forth.

"We are cursed, Waldo," she exclaims—"we", of course, signifying women—"born cursed from the time our mothers bring us into the world until the shrouds are put on us. Do not look at me as though I were talking nonsense. Everything has two sides—the outside that is ridiculous, the inside that is solemn."

And then, for page after page, the solemn inside is exposed for the poor mute's inspection. Marriage, of course, comes in for the worst of the philippic. "A little weeping, a little wheedling, a little self-degradation, a little careful use of our advantages, and then some man will say Come, be my wife. . . . There are men enough; but a woman who has sold herself, even for a ring and a new name, need hold her skirt aside for no creature in the street. They both earn their bread in one way."

And then rings out her "bitter little silvery laugh", and she bites her little teeth together, as she gathers energy for launching a new torrent of eloquence, culminating in the question, "Do you think if Napoleon had been born a woman, that he would have been content to give small tea-parties and talk small scandal?"

But fortunately Waldo doesn't think, or if he does, affords no verbal sign thereof.

There were several attempts to imitate Miss Schreiner, but Lyndalls are not reproduced to order and we have to wait for ten years for another fictional assault on the Victorian family citadel, fit for comparison with her masterpiece. This time the assailant is a man, Grant Allen, and the book is aptly named, *The Woman Who Did.* It is surely one of the world's

masterpieces of unconscious humour. The woman in question is even more intense than Lyndall; the author, being a man, is head over ears in love with his Herminia, and makes her perfectly beautiful, pure, noble, and self-sacrificing. She is also a lady of furiously advanced opinions, who has thrown up Girton because her fellow students are more occupied with their tripos subjects than the higher independence of women.

This higher independence, with her, takes the form of free love, and the freer the better. She is courted by a decent young fellow, and the scene of his proposal is certainly unique in the annals of courtship. All goes well to start with:

"It pleases me to hear you call me Herminia. Why should I shrink from admitting it? 'Tis the truth, you know, and the truth shall make us free."

It shall indeed, for the young lady's next speech ends with:

"I am yours this moment. You may do what you would with me."

But the obtuse swain—and there is the less excuse for him since he is over thirty—is tactless enough to ask how soon they may be married. The angel purity—which has not been very apparent, hitherto, to the coarse-minded reader—comes instantly into play:

"At the sound of those unexpected words from such lips as his a flush of shame and horror overspread Herminia's cheek. 'Never!' she cried firmly, drawing away. 'O Alan, what can you mean by it? Don't tell me, after all I've tried to make you feel and understand, you thought I could possibly consent to *marry* you!'"

Gilbert's Lord de Jacob Pillaloo, who

> Loves each woman, it is true,
> But never marries one,

would have found a kindred spirit in the pure

Herminia. One need hardly add that the rather scandalized Alan ultimately consents, like a rat without a tail, to do, and do, and do, and joins her in a state of un-nuptial bliss, until, shortly afterwards, he dies, and leaves her with nothing but a martyr's crown and a bastard daughter, who is base enough, on attaining years of discretion, to blame the social handicap of her illegitimacy on to her mother, who thereupon swallows prussic acid, and lies "with hands folded on her breast like some saint in the Middle Ages".

"Not for nothing", adds the author, 'does blind faith vouchsafe such martyrs to humanity. From their graves shall spring glorious the church of the future."

There are cynics who would not hesitate to say that it has sprung already, and that Mr. Aldous Huxley is its first Archbishop.

But a greater blow at the family ideal had been struck, from abroad, by Ibsen. It was in 1889 that his *Doll's House* was produced in England. We who are past the first enthusiasm excited in intellectual circles by the discovery of this new revolutionary genius, are perhaps inclined to question the fairness of Ibsen's implied propaganda, and even to take the part of the poor husband against the almost incredible priggishness of his wife's conduct in abandoning her home and children, on account of his momentary annoyance at discovering that besides being an habitual liar, flirt, and spendthrift, she has for the best reasons committed a forgery the discovery of which threatens him with ruin. But even those who objected most strongly to Ibsen's heroine were drawn into the debate. People began to ask—was family life so sacred after all? Might not the home itself be a whited sepulchre, full of dead men's bones? Could any relationship be consecrated, except by truth and reason? Were not husbands frequently sensual, inept, and inadequate, and was not a woman's first

duty after all to her own self, her sacred ego? It was perhaps an exaggeration of Mr. Punch that large, middle-aged ladies in Peckham were beginning to go off in four-wheeled " growlers ", because they refused to be any longer dolls and dicky-birds, but the seeds planted by Ibsen were alive and destined to bear fruit.

Meanwhile, the prospect of obtaining the vote was more remote than ever, and there seemed no hope of making any serious progress against the dull inertia of masculine prejudice. It was easy enough to persuade even a majority of Members of Parliament to express a polite readiness to support women's suffrage, but always with the mental reservation that it was not practical politics. A more important gain than that of the vote was secured by the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, reinforced by that of 1893, which removed the control of the husband from the disposal of his wife's property. That was, of course, a severe weakening of the compulsory sanctions by which the Victorian family compact had been maintained.

The advance of women towards emancipation, though not sensational, was continuous. It was tending to bring them more directly into competition with men and to replace the older order of domestic relationships by one that could not, as yet, be clearly foreseen.

CHAPTER VII

A TIME OF TRANSITION

It is customary to talk about the Naughty Nineties, the Renaissance of the Nineties, and so forth, but no one, that I am aware of, has ever tried to fasten a label on to the previous decade. Nor, one imagines, would it be too easy a task. For the eighties, though full of interest, by no means lend themselves to obvious generalization. Great things are germinating, but of great achievement there is disappointingly little. Even in material progress, there is no advance to strike the imagination, unless it be Pasteur's discovery of a cure for the ghastly disease of hydrophobia. The electric light is coming into use, though more slowly than has been expected, and mostly for public purposes. The telephone has also got to the stage of providing food for jokes about conversations between Edwin and Angelina. In shipping, the transition from iron to steel construction is being rapidly accomplished. The Ocean Greyhound has come into existence with such beautiful ships as the *City of Paris* and *City of New York* of the Inman Line. The Blue Ribbon of the Atlantic is already being competed for, and in the same record-breaking spirit the expresses of the Great Northern and North Western are racing each other to Edinburgh. More ominously, a new type of warship is coming in, a heavily-plated floating gun-platform propelled by steam alone.

Progress in invention is continuous, and takes place, often, so gradually that even its cumulative effects are apt to pass unperceived. But to the ordinary, un-

observant man, 1890 cannot have seemed so very different from 1880; except that the time of Dundrearys and crinolines was already beginning to seem strangely remote; it was as if, in something less than a generation, a new world had slipped unperceived into existence. Victoria was still on the throne, but the great Victorian Age was already a thing of the past, and we are in the *fin de siècle*, which though it may be Victorian in name, is as different from what we usually associate with the word as a "Trilby hat" from a "stovepipe", or the Jubilee from the Great Exhibition.

The great Victorians had been dropping off very fast during the eighties. Beaconsfield had gone and Darwin; Browning, Rossetti, Matthew Arnold, Bright and Carlyle. Newman had entered upon his ninetieth and last year, and a dark cloud, nevermore to be lifted, had settled upon the mind of Ruskin. Lord Tennyson was still to be seen, a consciously symbolic figure, with flapping cloak and lowering sombrero, pacing the downs above Freshwater, where the old beacon still stood on the site now occupied by his memorial. As for Gladstone, he had now for many years been the Grand Old Man, and was becoming an ancient prodigy, for ever unlocking a seemingly inexhaustible word-hoard, and looking forward to another Midlothian Campaign and another Premiership, to be marked by the crowning achievement of his career—that of a permanent settlement of the relations between England and Ireland. Men who listened to his booming periods reflected, not without awe, that he had heard the guns booming for the news of Waterloo. There were even one or two scattered survivors of that distant day, not forgotten by their country, for did not the Guards turn out to fire a volley over the grave of one veteran who had been maintained for some time at the public expense in Caterham workhouse, while as late as 1894, a certain

John Stacey, who had once tramped the road from Brussels to Charleroi, now foot-slogged it from Yorkshire to London in the hope of getting a pension even lordlier than the tenpence a day with which the Budget was already burdened on his behalf.

But the greatest symbol of Victorian permanence was of course the Queen herself. Indeed, she had now become wholly a symbol, and hardly a woman at all. From the obscurity of Balmoral she had emerged into a blaze of triumph, such as even the *Roi Soleil* had never enjoyed. Four kings had ridden in her Jubilee procession and three Crown Princes, conspicuous among them her red-bearded son-in-law, more like a hero of the Niebelungenlied than a commander of modern armies, resplendent in his white, cuirassier uniform, and showing no sign of the germs of fatal disease multiplying in his system. There was a perfect bevy of potentates of all colours and nationalities, and representatives from various parts of an Empire upon which—as her subjects were just beginning to realize—the sun never set. There were holidays and junketings, the streets blazing with illuminations, the fleet banging away blank ammunition, and soldiers performing more heroic feats of spit and polish than even the Duke of Cambridge's army had ever done before. In Hyde Park, a little girl, representing 30,000 poor children there assembled, gave the Queen a bouquet on which was embroidered, " God bless our Queen, not Queen alone, but Mother, Queen and Friend ", and then all the children sang *God save the Queen*, " somewhat ", as the new Mother-goddess noted in her diary " out of tune ".

There was a perfect orgy of collective self-satisfaction and everybody was engaged in the delightful occupation of comparing the glory of 1887 with the prehistoric darkness of 1837. England had suddenly become self-conscious; she thanked God that she was not as other nations were, nor the present as the

past had been. The Laureate, borne aloft on a whirlwind of inspiration, appealed to

> The Patriot Architect,
> You that shape for Eternity

to

> Raise a stately memorial,
> Something regally gorgeous,
> Some Imperial Institute . . .

nor did he, amid his finest frenzy, forget to chant the excellent precept,

> *Give your gold to the hospital.*

It is true that in the last stanza of this Ode he becomes uneasily suspicious that there may be thunders moaning in the distance, spectres moving in the darkness—but this is but a momentary lapse, and the Laureate hastens to assure us that there is really no reason for alarm; the Hand of Light is leading Her Majesty's people, the thunder will duly pass and the spectres vanish according to plan. Such an assurance from such a source must have been highly consoling to any improbable person who still happened to remember our old friend the bard of the *Prophetic Times*, and his now sixteen years' old warning that the "End" was near.

There was certainly never a time when spectres had seemed less formidable than in the eighties. Such as they were, they raised no more hairs than those rollicking ghosts of Gilbert's, with their "grisly grim good-night". In fact, if we want to get back into the atmosphere of that time, we can hardly do better than treat ourselves to a course of Gilbert and Sullivan's Operas. It is the music, the dialogue, of a society that feels itself too secure to be serious or angry or troubled about anything. Even the satire plays harmlessly, like summer lightning by which nothing—not even an æsthete or a peer—is scorched

or blasted. How amiable a combination is this of Gilbert-Sullivan, and in what admirable taste, compared with that of Aristophanes—let alone of Dean Swift.

The sea of time was closing over the great Victorian Age in ripples of Gilbertian laughter. Gilbert, indeed, retained many of the characteristics of that age, its romanticism, its common sense, more than a little of its sentimentality. But he lacked that fundamental seriousness with which the genuine Victorians took themselves and their ideals. Nothing could have been further removed from the published sentiments of one who was to end up as a Metropolitan " Beak " than Swinburne's passionate assaults on virtue, and yet these were perhaps less telling in the long run than the sheer idiocy of:

> Morality, heavenly link,
> To thee I'll eternally drink!
> I'm awfully fond of that heavenly bond,

and the Low Church Lord, upon His throne, must have exchanged anxious glances with his Consort, Mrs. Grundy, as the strains floated up to them about Sir Macklin, that " priest severe ", who

> Could in every action show
> A sin, and nobody could doubt him.

Gilbert was in no sense " advanced "; his most deliberate attempt at satire was his attack in *Patience* on the æsthetic craze. What makes him so especially the representative man of the eighties is the fact that while he could no longer be serious about the old ideals, he had not the least hankering after a substitute. His laughter wells up from a consciousness of perfect security. It was a safe age, that could see life steadily, and see it whole, from a Gilbertian angle.

Almost equally representative, in his way, was Oscar Wilde, whom a good many people were pleased

to equate with Bunthorne, the "æsthetic sham" of *Patience*. It was not until the nineties, as Wilde approached the tragic climax of his career, that it was altogether certain that he was something more than an æsthetic and literary sham. It was as a *personality* that he was famous in the eighties. He had not originated the æsthetic movement, but even when an undergraduate at Oxford, he had instinctively divined that for an ambitious young man it afforded the *readiest means of attracting attention to his personality*. The middle-class Philistine, far from being the all-powerful tyrant of the mid-century, was already a butt for ridicule. Even in villas culture was becoming fashionable, and good taste, of a sort, the pride of every housewife. The three-volume novels with which these ladies solaced their ample leisure are mildly and discreetly æsthetic—the authoress, or author, takes the attitude of one cultured person addressing another. Bits of italicized French and Italian bestrew the pages. The characters are conducted to the places starred in Baedeker, and made to say the sort of things that Herr Baedeker would doubtless have approved of. And no genteel novel is complete unless the action is hung up fairly frequently for such idyllic stuff as this—taken at random from one of Rhoda Broughton's novels:

"In what life-giving whiffs comes the kindly wind! Did ever homely-coated bird say such sweet things as does the blackbird from among the cherry-boughs? and the little vulgar villa garden has grown like that of which Keats spake" . . . and here follow three lines of Keats, before we are reminded that the hero has been standing all this time before his Belinda, waiting one lightest sign from her to lie down at her feet and be trampled on. The appropriate adjective for this sort of thing was, in those days, "sweet".

Oscar Wilde was flying at higher game than unpretentious Miss Broughton, who was no doubt

content with the handsome income that must have accrued from her steady sales. He aspired to dazzle by his genius, to become the supreme arbiter of modern elegancies. He had all the Irishman's quick wit and instant command of language, backed by the sort of courage that is not too easily distinguishable from impudence. Even as an undergraduate, he made himself the most talked-of person in the University by the extravagance of his æstheticism, and when some beefy Philistines endeavoured to deflate his conceit by dragging him up a hill, he defeated them by languidly inviting their attention to the beauty of the view.

He was a master of the art of advertisement, and he soon became a sort of informal publicity agent for the new æstheticism. This brought him into what was, at first, a friendly rivalry with Whistler, and the two were seen everywhere together at social and artistic gatherings, sharpening their wits on each other's epigrams. But even if Whistler had not been in the habit of quarrelling with everybody, his austere zeal would never have tolerated for long the intrusion into the sacred precincts of his art of "Oscar—the amiable, irresponsible, esurient Oscar—with no more sense of a picture than of the fit of a coat". But by 1886, when Whistler's scorn was first visited upon Wilde, æstheticism had already ceased to be a craze. It was no longer necessary for beauty to fight for her right to exist.

The middle-class Philistine—the Bottles of Arnold and the Podsnap of Dickens—had ceased to be a power in the land. He was essentially a Puritan, and the middle class was beginning to make Charles II's discovery that Puritanism was no religion for a gentleman. The suggestion that you might damn your soul by dalliance with the Muses would hardly have gone down in the drawing-room of Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns. If Philistinism was to have any chance

ted aristocratic.
who flourishes
ld would have
called a Philistine at all, but a Barbarian, somewhat *déclassé*. There is no question now of art being bad for the soul, but rather of its tendency to cultivate the soul at the expense of the muscles. The objection to the æsthete was not to the strange sins he glorified on paper—not, at any rate, till he insisted on putting these sins into practice—but because he was supposed to be an effeminate, drooping creature, with long hair and flabby muscles, the sort of fellow who would seat himself down in a restaurant, call for a lily in a vase, gaze on it during lunch time, and declare that he was satisfied. The Oxford undergraduates who had ragged Wilde had done so because of his refusal to conform to the public school pattern, and now the sons of Suburbia were going to public schools, or if they had not gone, tried all the harder to cultivate the public school spirit. And the public schools were hardening in the faith that muscle was the only thing that counted, and that intellect was slightly bad form.

There was, indeed, one remarkable, though by no means concerted, attempt to arrest the intellectual rot of the aristocracy. Quite a number of clever young people gravitated together into a loosely compacted set that was nicknamed—though not by its members—the Souls. It included such lights as George Curzon, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, Arthur Balfour, George Wyndham, and those two brilliant Tennant sisters, one of whom married a future Colonial Secretary, and the other a future Prime Minister. For a brief space the phenomenon was witnessed of men and women who had ridden themselves tired during the day in pursuit of vermin, assembling in the evening to indulge in intellectual games, very different from the baccarat that crowned the day's pleasure of the Marlborough House Set. But the Souls were too plainly at variance

with the spirit of their time and class to exert any lasting influence. In a few years the set was broken up and its lights scattered or quenched, and thanks to money, sport, and the public school spirit, the display of intellectual parts in a country house would be almost as inconceivable as that of the more despised parts of the body.

Nothing, however, could rob the British public of its romantic faith in the brilliance of its aristocracy. To judge by the literature and drama of the time, Society was composed entirely of charming and cultured people, who were raised above all mundane anxieties in order that they might trifle elegantly with life in an environment of luxury. Ouida with her ineffable super-guardsmen, Wilde with his epigrammatic lords, were hierophants of the same cult, were performing the same service for its worshippers of translating them from a workaday into an ideal world :

> So to the haven they them bring
> That they desire to see.

The lordliness of lords was about the one thing that Wilde took really seriously. Like Gilbert, he was representative of his time in his capacity for turning all things to good-humoured ridicule. He could say even of the Holy Bible, that when he thought of the harm that book had done, he despaired of doing anything to equal it. Of the almost holier Victorian cult of work, he remarked that industry was the root of all ugliness, and the condition of perfection idleness. It grieved him to think how many young men had started with perfect profiles, and ended by adopting some useful profession. He praised the art of lying, and affected a sympathetic interest in that of poisoning. In fact, until the crash came, his whole object in life might have been to demonstrate to his age the supreme unimportance of being earnest.

We regard him now as a tragic figure. But that was not how he appeared in the eighties. He seemed a being of pure sunshine, a social butterfly, but without the stin f himself as carry im. He talked his brilliant nonsense, launched out into preposterous but delightful anecdote, with the sole object of giving pleasure, and thereby achieving distinction. He was no doubt a pure egotist, but that most delightful kind of egotist who lays himself out to be liked. If there was some perverse kink in his nature, a mental disease that was perhaps hereditary, it was not yet suspected. Who could forecast a tragic part for so perfect a comedian as Oscar Wilde?

And yet it was not all comedy in the eighties. If it was a time of laughter, it was also one of cultivated intensity, often for no other apparent object than that of being intense. There were æsthetic women who went about in flowing garments, with curved spines and protruded chins, trying to resemble the women in Rossetti and Burne-Jones pictures. This fashion passed with the æsthetic movement, but there were other things than art about which to be intense. There were the rights—not to speak of the wrongs—of women, and we have seen of what gasping emotion enthusiasts like Olive Schreiner and Grant Allen were capable when this subject was on the tapis. There was also religion—and it is notable that intensity deepened in proportion to the decline of faith.

One of the most striking and intense books of this time is Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Robert Elsmere,* that obtained an appreciative notice from Mr. Gladstone and raised its authoress at once to the pinnacle of fame. Mrs. Ward was related to Matthew Arnold, and the problem she set herself, and her hero, was how to hunt with the infidel hounds and run with the Christian hare, in other words, how to destroy the foundations on which religion had hitherto reposed, and keep the

superstructure of sweetness and light intact. Robert is an intensely earnest young clergyman, who throws up his living because he cannot stomach the supernatural, and hurls himself with intense enthusiasm into the cult of a God, who is Arnold's Power making for Righteousness, and Christ, another earnest young preacher, who ceased to exist on, or about, Good Friday 33. Robert is keenly interested in the new movement towards social reform, and proclaims his gospel of service to earnest proletarians in the East End. It does him and his creator the greatest credit, but one does not quite see the necessity of enlisting what Matthew Arnold had left of God, and his niece of Christ, in the venture. Any atheist can be a humanitarian. Mrs. Humphry Ward is, like so many of her contemporaries, being intense in default of being definite. But a fog is not improved by intensifying it, though it may have the consoling effect of hiding the precipice from the traveller.

Between Wardian intensity and Wildean laughter there is not so wide a gulf fixed as might be imagined. Both satisfied the same need of evasion. For during the eighties, though there was no obvious change on the surface, the foundations of faith and society were rapidly crumbling. The solemn compromises, which the Victorians had taken for certainties, were ceasing to be sacred. The clergyman of the fifties had taken his stand on the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. Wilde laughed at the Bible, and coupled it with Beer as a formative influence on the English character; Mrs. Ward admitted that it might contain a good many tall stories, but made up for that by saying beautiful, intense things about what, if anything, was left after the critics had been through it. Meanwhile:

> The hungry sheep look up and are not fed,
> But swoll'n with wind and the rank mists they draw
> Rot inwardly . . .

Which explains why the most permanent influence of the eighties proved to be that of Thomas Hardy, who had the courage to look the cosmic situation—so far as it was apparent to the men of his time—starkly in the face. What he saw was certainly not food for laughter, nor yet for consolation. There were—only too truly—powers not ourselves, but they no more made for righteousness than the earthquake that destroyed Lisbon or the plague germs that multiplied in Marcus Aurelius. Human heroism consists not in the ability to withstand these forces, but in the refusal, even when crushed, to surrender. It is the courage of the highwayman, who, when the cart has left him dangling, kicks off his shoes in a final gesture of invincibility.

No mere summary account of the eighties can convey an impression of the extraordinary richness and variety of the work that was being accomplished. If there was little of outstanding eminence, there was God's plenty of that which only just fell short of it. I have by me a bound volume of the *English Illustrated Magazine*, from October 1883 to September 1884, and a glance through the table of contents is enough to show what extraordinary opulence of talent there was even in what is apt to seem a rather drab and prosaic time. For poetry—not nearly such a strong team as might have been collected—we have Swinburne, William Morris, Walter Crane, Theodore Watts, Edmund Gosse, and J. H. Shorthouse. The serials are by Henry James in two parts, and Charlotte M. Yonge in twelve, while there are stories by Thomas Hardy, Stanley Weyman, Walter Besant, J. H. Shorthouse, and William Black. Huxley writes on science, and is reinforced on the geological side by Geikie, and on that of natural history by Grant Allen. Robert Louis Stevenson writes on dogs, Andrew Lang on cricket, and F. W. Maitland, the one writer who has ever been able to make jurisprudence as fascinating

as fiction to the layman, gives an account of the law courts. Another great lawyer still with us, Frederick Pollock, writes on Dartmoor, though not on that particular aspect of it that might be supposed to appeal to the criminologist. Archibald Forbes, prince of war-correspondents, furnishes an apology for Bazaine, besides a sidelight on the still rough and primitive colonial life in New Zealand. A glimpse of a quaint and antique Japan is afforded by H. W. Lucy, the "Toby M.P." of *Punch*; Professor Mahaffy, quitting ancient Greece, describes it as it is in 1884; while the author of *John Halifax Gentleman* conducts us on a tour through Cornwall. Austin Dobson is at his delicate best on old London, and H. D. Traill, the historian of Social England, officiates for Bath. On the literary side we have Henry James writing on Matthew Arnold, and Alfred Ainger on the women of Chaucer, while for art criticism we have Comyns Carr.

Such is the pick of the writing, but the letterpress is not more remarkable than the black and white illustrations, which show the extremely high level at which this art was maintained before the development of photographic reproduction contributed to depress it. Here we have Walter Crane, romanticizing in the Pre-Raphaelite vein, and Randolph Caldecott, bringing Æsop up to date with that humour of his that is so redolent of an unspoilt English countryside. We see Du Maurier, not in the vein of social satire, but of solemn sweetness, illustrating a poem of his own translation on Death as a Friend. We have another *Punch* artist, just coming into fame with his vivid impressions of contemporary life—Harry Furniss. We have several examples of Hugh Thomson, the only illustrator who has ever caught the spirit of Jane Austen; there are nature woodcuts by R. W. Macbeth, and drawings of Bruges by A. Danse, which leave one in amazement that artists of the calibre of

these two last have not left household names. But as we turn over the pages we realize that there is a wealth of hardly inferior talent on which to draw.

If a man were condemned to a few months with one book on a desert island, he could do worse than load his kitbag with this dingy volume, which I am ashamed to confess lay too long unmarked, except by the dust of years, in an angle of my own library shelves, acting as a support for other books.

What bound magazine of our own day could hold a candle to it? The eighties may have been a time of crumbling foundations and waning ideals, but judge them by what they achieved, short of the very greatest, and who shall dare pronounce an unfavourable verdict?

CHAPTER VIII

THE AWAKENING OF LABOUR

In the early spring of 1883, Karl Marx, according to his own philosophy, ceased to exist. His funeral, in Highgate Cemetery, attracted no particular attention, except among a few people of extreme opinions. The man whose remains were thus obscurely disposed of was destined, though dead, to exercise a power great enough to overturn or imperil the whole fabric of civilized society. Multitudes would make a religion of his doctrines who had never performed the labour of reading his gospel, for, indeed, the Bible or Koran in which he had written it was so voluminously stodgy as to be almost unreadable.

It was not that Marx had introduced a new spirit into the world, but that he had adapted the spirit that had come to prevail in international affairs to the relations between the two great social classes of dividend-holders and wage-earners. He was the Bismarck of the proletariat. He looked for the Socialist millennium as Bismarck had looked for the unity of Germany, and he sought to achieve it by the same means, blood and iron. He believed that the "haves" would never stand and deliver their all to the "have-nots" unless they were forced to do so, and accordingly he looked forward to a ruthless class warfare, without truce or compromise, until the capitalist class, as a class, was wiped out of existence. He believed in neither God nor devil, soul nor immortality; the only motives that counted with him, or, by his version of history, had ever counted, were those of material self-interest.

No doubt if Marx had never existed, matters would have taken much the same course. For as Gladstone had said of the franchise agitation, the social forces were moving onward in their might and majesty. The spirit of an age will carve its own human channels. It was not to be expected that the working classes would rest content for ever with the privilege of marking their crosses for a Disraeli or a Gladstone. They might, indeed, be inoculated with the team spirit by the party managers, and work off their combative instincts as harmlessly at the polls as they did in the football arena. But sooner or later some of them were bound to ask, "Now we have got the vote, what good is it going to do for us?" and from some quarter the answer was bound to come, as it came in the first of the pamphlets of the Fabian Society, published in 1884: "We live in a competitive society with Capital in the hands of individuals . . . the time approaches when Capital can be made public property . . . the power is in your hands, and chances of using that power are continually within your reach." Or to put it more simply, "You, Bill Smith, are toiling—if you are lucky enough to get a job—for something round about a pound a week. Your neighbour, Mr. William Smythe, who does not toil at all, may be drawing a hundred, or possibly a thousand, of the said pounds in a week, and society guarantees him a proportionate amount of the fruits of your labour. The vote provides a means by which you and your mates can order society at your own sweet collective will. You can, with the assistance of the police, boot Smythe out of his mansion and fit it up for your own holidays; you can collar his bank and share out his dividends. The law shall in future be your law and not Smythe's law. Up, then, and vote!"

William Morris expressed it with his ...

when he called upon the rich to hear and tremble, and threatened:

> Is it war then? Will ye perish as the
> dry wood in the fire?

The Victorians of the mid-century had accepted the existing social system as they had accepted the Bible and morals of respectability. Their science of economics embraced a series of highly abstract propositions whose concrete effect was to justify the case of the "haves" against the "have-nots". So long as prosperity was on the increase, there was little serious discontent among the workers. But the slump and agricultural depression that dogged the steps of Lord Beaconsfield's administration gave the social system the most serious jar it had received since the Hungry Forties. And accordingly it is during the eighties that the workers begin to display an uneasy sense that all, for them, is not for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The voice of the agitator is heard in the land, and when the depression is renewed, as it is in the middle of the decade, things happen of an alarming and—some nervous people may think—revolutionary significance.

Drunken with the eloquence of John Burns, a mob of social derelicts, white-faced and ragged, flooded out of Trafalgar Square into the calm precincts of Pall Mall. The clubmen, attracted by the spectacle, thronged to the windows, and regarded the procession with good-natured amusement. Perhaps the amusement was a little too apparent. Stones began to fly; there was a tinkle of falling glass, a movement backwards, and for the rest of the afternoon indignant comments, in a rather draughty atmosphere, on the state of the country and the police force. For owing to the helpless inefficiency of the authorities, the police were nowhere to be seen, and the mob found the West End appar-

ently at their mercy. For two hours they drifted about the streets, smashing a certain amount of property, but offering no personal violence. They penetrated as far as South Audley Street, raiding shops, and a lady who witnessed it describes the sudden alarming apparition of a crowd of rough-looking men running up the street, uttering a kind of hoarse roar. At last a police inspector, more *capable than his superiors, took charge of the situation* and easily drove back the mob when it tried to enter Oxford Street. The sequel was curious, for a fund raised at the Mansion House for relief of the unemployed was promptly doubled.

That was in 1886. In the next year, that of the Jubilee, the spirit of revolutionary violence assumed a form that recalled the days of the Chartist petition. The authorities—for what appeared to them sufficient reasons—announced their intention of forbidding a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square. The organizers of the meeting determined that it should be held in the teeth of the authorities, and a number of processions converged, under the leaden sky of a November day, upon the Square. But there was no unpreparedness this time. There were not only an immense force of police, but also the foot-guards, with bayonets fixed, lining one side of the Square, and Life Guards, with their plumed helmets and glittering cuirasses, threading their way through the sombre masses. The mob had come determined to have its way, and at the entrance of the Strand there was a brief but fierce battle with the police, but for the most part the processions were broken up by police charges before they could get to the scene of action. There was, not unnaturally, some rough work with truncheons, though none with rifles or bayonets, and one unfortunate youth succumbed to his injuries. Considering that the whole affair arose out of an attempt of a vast and organized mob to

redress its grievances by violence, the only wonder is that it passed off with so few casualties as it did, and when one thinks of Red Sunday at St. Petersburg, the name Bloody Sunday seems a little lacking in sense of proportion. But the funeral of the poor youth was made the occasion for a really magnificent poem by William Morris, who had been in one of the broken-up processions, a dirge to the refrain,

Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all, if they would dusk the day.

But anarchic violence is not to the taste of the British workman, and there was no more need for slaying. A more effective though less sensational development of class warfare was witnessed in the great London dock strike of 1889. Hitherto it had been the skilled artisans, the aristocracy of Labour, who had organized themselves into Trades Unions, but now it was the casual and unskilled labourers, who had daily competed against one another for jobs, who showed a hitherto unsuspected capacity for combined and militant action. In spite of the inconvenience that it caused, their struggle for a lordly sixpence an hour was regarded with sympathy, that expressed itself in the form of loosened purse-strings, even in the city. The men, poor as they were, behaved with a restraint that would have been inconceivable, under similar circumstances, in any other industrial community. The venerable Cardinal Manning, together with the Lord Mayor, was accepted as mediator, and the dispute eventually ended with the docker secure of his tanner.

The most remarkable feature of the new working-class movement was the fact that it derived the pick of its brains from a small, but extremely able group of middle-class allies. It is in the nature of things unlikely that men trained in the factory and workshop can often develop, to their fullest extent, the

essential qualifications for intellectual leadership, though how completely this initial handicap is sometimes overcome is proved by such born leaders as Mr. J. H. Thomas and Mr. John Burns. It may be asked what possible inducement any middle-class people can have for forwarding a policy so plainly suicidal from their own point of view. It is probable that reason, in the last resort, has very little to do with it. It will appear, when we come to consider the rise of imperialism, that one of the most powerful social influences of our time is the sheer boredom of the suburban population with the highly artificial conditions of its own existence. Somewhere in the back of every villa-dweller's mind is a desire to escape from the villa, either into some mansion of Belgravia, or somewhere East of Suez, or into an order of society where these vaguely unsatisfactory conditions of the present shall be remoulded nearer to the heart's desire.

It was in the winter of 1883-4 that the Fabian Society was founded, and though in 1885 it had only attained a personnel of 40, and never in the course of its existence topped the 4,000 mark, it exercised an influence out of all proportion to its numbers. It gave the earnest man or woman who felt that any order of society would be a welcome change from one of imitative gentility, the chance of promoting a social revolution of not too alarming a kind. For though the first Fabian pamphlet might have earned the approval of Marx himself, the Fabians soon discovered a more practicable way than that of incipient Bolshevism. They accepted the class war and principles of Socialism with the consoling proviso that nothing should be done in a hurry. They took their name from a Roman general who had been called "The Dawdler".

This exactly suited the genius of that remarkable couple who, in conjunction with the dashing free-

lance, Mr. Bernard Shaw, were the dominating personalities of the Society. Mrs. Sidney Webb was an earnest young lady with whom Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns would have been proud to scrape an acquaintance, and had taken to social reform as an escape not from the pettiness of villadom, but from that very paradise of authentic Society which every daughter of Suburbia desires to see. She and her husband were Socialists, but their Socialism was by no means essential to their joint career. If they had called themselves Tories, or anything but Liberals, it would not have made so vital a difference. Their true work was not to preach a social doctrine, but to make straight a new path of approach to social problems.

Hitherto statesmen and even economists had been content with more or less facile generalizations, and had rarely condescended to get down to hard tacks, and to find out the obscure and complex details of the disease before making the diagnosis and prescribing the cure. What the faith of the Webbs really amounted to was that there were immense and hitherto unrealized opportunities for collective action, if only the job were tackled scientifically. Disraeli, who had the instincts of a social reformer, had long ago spoken of England as being divided into two nations of the rich and the poor. But Disraeli was a romantic, and he had done no more than give a highly coloured and imaginative account of one nation to the other. The Webbs, who were not romantic at all, went to work accumulating, and sorting, and collating endless statistics, not only about the present, but about the past. Like a careful housewife, they devised ways and means for clearing out dusty corners and putting untidy things straight. For an effective Socialist policy, these ways and means were no doubt indispensable. But they would equally serve the purpose of any conscientious

bureaucrat. Signor Mussolini might do worse than engage Lord and Lady Passfield as permanent economic advisers to his Fascist government.

By the end of the century, people had come to regard social problems from an angle that was hardly approached in the sixties. It is true that there were still economists occupying academic chairs and grinding the wind of abstraction. Everybody, when asked to do so, honoured their authority, but nobody paid the least attention to anything they said, except undergraduates sweating for triposes. Demand might precede supply, or supply demand, or both, as the great Alfred Marshall laid down, act together like a pair of scissors—it was about as important, one way or the other, as the celebrated controversy about the right end to start eating an egg. But it *was* important to know the relative advantages of gas and electricity for municipal supply, or how far it was possible to secure decent conditions for laundry workers in private houses.

By the end of the eighties, Charles Booth, no Socialist, but a shipowner and a Conservative, had embarked on his monumental and detailed survey of Life and Labour in London. And in 1894 the Royal Commission on Labour, after accumulating an immense mass of evidence, published its final report, which forms a sociological landmark in the history of blue-books.

Without some such preparation as this, it is obvious that all talk about Socialism is empty air, and that any attempt to realize the Socialist Utopia could only result in chaos. For the essence of Socialism, as distinct from mere anarchy, consists in an attempt by mankind to take over from Providence or the blind working of competition the task of ordering its own economic destinies. To approach such a task without minute and detailed knowledge would be as if the first casual loafer were taken out of the streets

and put into the signal-box at Crewe or Willesden with instructions to run it on his own lines for the next two hours. William Morris, that most lovable and naïve of romantics, had written a book called, most appropriately, *News from Nowhere*, in which he described the coming of a social millennium. There is a massacre in Trafalgar Square, a general strike, and then the government—having alienated its own minions—collapses, and the whole country settles joyfully down to a perpetual picnic of shepherds and shepherdesses—all very young and attractive—picturesque craftsmen, and their like. It is all idyllically simple—in Nowhere.

But the Webbs, and the new school of social reformers, were aiming at the gradual transformation of a comparatively anarchic into a minutely ordered industrial society, and they did not underestimate the difficulties of the task. They were making the world possible for Socialism—they were making equally possible an order of society based upon a slavery of human units on a far grander scale than anything dreamed of in ancient Rome. Perhaps, with the coming of the Marxian Kingdom, that and Socialism might turn out to be one and the same thing.

Meanwhile Labour itself had to be rendered fit to govern. This task was being taken in hand by the Trades Unions, whose most important function did not consist in the organizing of industrial warfare, but in the school for collective action that they afforded to the intellectual pick of the working class. The habit of association in local lodges, the spade-work of administration, the wider scope afforded by delegate meetings and the creation of a central secretariat, formed a school in which future class leaders might be trained. Indeed it was a question of whether Labour politics might not come to be financed and dictated, in the long run, by these formidable corporations, that might thereby attain

to a power in the State overshadowing that of the State itself.

Meanwhile the first, tentative beginnings of an attempt by Labour to capture Parliament were to be seen. There had been two Labour representatives in the Parliament of 1880; in the election of 1885 this number was increased to a dozen, including a champion of agricultural Labour in the person of Joseph Arch. But these members did not yet function as more than a group within the Liberal and Radical Party. The group suffered in the election next summer on Home Rule, two of its most prominent members, Leicester and Arch himself, losing their seats.

It was in 1889, when Karl Marx had been lying for six years in Highgate Cemetery, that a young student, who had been sent down from Kazan University for taking part in political meetings, was allowed to return, and forthwith applied himself to an intensive study of the Master's works. He was afterwards to be known as Lenin.

BOOK IV

THE NINETIES

CHAPTER I

GATHERING CLOUDS

The wonderful century, as it was already beginning to be called, had entered upon its last and—since progress is cumulative—presumably its most wonderful decade. Never in the history of the world had civilized man regarded his prospects with such unquestioning optimism. And of all optimists, the greatest was John Bull. He had taken to regarding himself in the looking-glass, and observing the wonderful way in which he was putting on flesh. Never had there been such expansion—bigger and better everything! It was good to have been born into such an age. The only fly in the ointment was that even this present was but a poor foretaste of what the future was going to be.

Never, even during the twentieth century, has there been such an active consciousness of being up to date as during the nineties. We, with our aeroplanes and our wireless, our jazz and our monkey glands, are not able to recapture that fine, careless rapture of modernity that we associate with the *fin de siècle*. Perhaps the mere fact of its being the end of a century had a little to do with it. For mankind is to some extent the dupe of its own conventions. A century of progress ought, it was instinctively felt, to rise to some wonderful culmination. The end crowns the work, and despite the fact that progress

is supposed to have a good many thousand centuries to go on progressing in, it seemed appropriate that the last decade of this particular century should have a certain artistic finish, that it should be a time of harvesting the fruits of progress, of realizing and enjoying the wonders of the new world that the machines were making for Man.

Thus the expression "up to date" came to have an almost divine significance. To say a thing was up to date or, alternatively, *fin de siècle*, was the highest praise that it was possible to bestow. Even in art and poetry the rage was all to be ahead of the times, to do something better than anything dreamed of in the past, something worthy of this wonderful brand-new age.

But in England there was a double process of self-suggestion. The nineties were not only the culmination of a century, but also of a reign. The Queen was engaged in what was of all things the most popular at this time, she was breaking a record. Only three of her predecessors had had jubilees. She had outreigned Edward III in the year of her own, 1887; after '93 the only one left in the running was her poor old mad grandfather. And in '97 the year of her Diamond Jubilee, she would be le[ft] alone. Her feat was symbolic, for England was als[o] engaged in record breaking—she held the recor[d] for Empire, for wealth, for commerce, for sea-pow[er] for the size of her metropolis, for social prosperi[ty] It was no wonder that the achievement of the rec[ord] reign afforded the excuse for an orgy of self-congra[tu]lation that was also, in its way, a world recor[d] collective Coué-ism.

Our old friend of the *Prophetic Times*, if he still alive, must have felt a little foolish abou[t] warning, twenty years ago, that the end was For never had the skies seemed more brill[iant] unclouded, never had the barometer point[ed]

steadily to "set fair". A generation would soon have passed since the last war between two great civilized powers, and the peace of Europe—it was true that it was known as the Armed Peace—seemed established more firmly than ever before. There had been some threatening war-clouds not so long ago, when General Boulanger was posturing and swaggering on his black charger before the good citizens of Paris and it was pretty clearly understood that Lord Salisbury would be prepared to turn a Nelson eye to the violation of treaty rights involved in a German sweep through Belgium. There had been a time when tension between Russia and Austria had reached such a pitch that Bismarck had been forced to make public the terms of the Austro-German defensive alliance. But these clouds had drifted harmlessly away, and—what was really extraordinary—the business of partitioning the African Continent was getting itself somehow accomplished by peaceful means. And France had now an Empire to console her for the loss of her two provinces.

It was in the year 1890 that a cartoon of extraordinary pathos and solemnity was drawn by John Tenniel for *Punch*. It represented an aged pilot being dropped from one of those ocean liners that were so conspicuous a triumph of recent progress. The old man, half-way down the ladder, was steadying himself for a moment against the side of the great vessel, while from above, a handsome young man, with an imperial crown on his head, regarded him thoughtfully. The pilot was Bismarck, the skipper who had just got rid of him was Queen Victoria's grandson, the new German Emperor. It is proof of Tenniel's genius that he appears to have intuitively grasped the critical significance of this incident. For indeed, the year 1890 is seen, in the light of events, to have marked the division of the Armed Peace. Before that, under the dominating

influence of Bismarck's personality, the peace had been not only kept but strengthened. France might chafe as she would at the still unhealed wound in her side, but she was faced with the solid strength of the Triple Alliance, and seemed hopeless of obtaining an ally to join her in so forlorn a hope as a war of revenge on Germany. For the Treaty of Reinsurance with Russia, the crowning triumph of Bismarck's diplomacy, held good, and was coming up that year for renewal.

But the young Emperor was going to steer his own vessel without any assistance from the overbearing old pilot who had as good as skippered his imperial father and grandfather on their own bridge. He was confident of his brilliance, confident too in his Germany. Bismarck's pawky caution had served its turn, but now youth would inspire a policy more in accord with the spirit of the times. An amiable nonentity was installed in the Iron Chancellor's place, but it was the Emperor who was now, as by divine right, in the saddle. And the first effect of the new regime was that Germany—with a gesture of superb carelessness—refused to renew the Reinsurance Treaty. Soon the spectacle was witnessed of the proud and reactionary Autocrat of All the Russias putting out feelers for an alliance with the Republic of the Tricolour. Already the shadow of 1914 was beginning to darken over Europe.

But even with France at last provided with a first-class ally, there was no immediate danger to Germany. The Dual Alliance, by itself, was no match for the Triple. Germany could afford, at a pinch, to dispense with Russia, provided that her diplomacy insured her from attack by the remaining great power, England. And this was simple—just a matter of keeping from aggression that was, under the circumstances, suicidal. England was naturally friendly to Germany—the Germans were supposed to be kinsmen; they were

traditional allies. There seemed no conceivable reason why the millions of orderly, peaceable German peasants and burghers should ever be set on to hate and kill their more or less Anglo-Saxon cousins. Towards restless, sensitive France there was, in spite of the Crimea, a temperamental British antagonism, while the Russian Bear was still supposed to be capable of plotting any villainy. If ever England came off the fence of isolation, nobody doubted that it would be on the German side, and to many it seemed—the sooner the better. A firm understanding between England and the Triple Alliance could have made the peace of the world secure, as long as it lasted. The lives of many, the prosperity of all Englishmen and Germans, and—for that matter—Frenchmen and Russians, would have been secured by such an arrangement.

In reading history, the closer we get to the facts, the more maddening becomes our feeling of helplessness that we cannot have the past over again. There is here nothing dignified enough to be called tragic—the motives are petty, the characters only significant by the power with which some murderous destiny has endowed their most trivial actions. So long as Bismarck is in power, one is conscious of intelligence, however unscrupulous and ruthless, guiding European diplomacy along the perilous paths of the Armed Peace. Now that he is gone, there is no longer even sane selfishness. The neurotic Emperor, with his withered arm and his probably consequent, but certainly obsessive, vanity, would have been an ideal object for treatment by the school of psycho-analytic doctors that was to arise in the coming century. He was at the mercy of his impulses; and his impulses, except perhaps to a doctor so trained, were incalculable. An entourage of nonentities, of charlatans, of sycophants, of perverts, executed and swayed his will. There was

among them the master wire-puller von Holstein, of whom few people in Germany, and hardly any in England, had ever heard—he was Councillor of the Political Bureau of the Foreign Office, and exercised in secret a power greater than that of any statesman . . . it was he who had been so afraid of his enemy Bismarck's possible return to power, and confident of Russia's never joining France, that he had engineered the jettisoning of the Reinsurance Treaty; and now he was so certain that England could never join France and Russia, that he cunningly advised the Kaiser not to accept her offer of alliance unless—as seemed certain if one would only hold out long enough—she would come in as the humble satellite of Germany.

But in the first years of the reign, all the omens seemed favourable. The Emperor was after all half an Englishman; he had a love—that was as genuine as any emotion of his could be—for his venerable grandmother, and his words in public breathed the most cordial friendship for England. Every August, at the Cowes Regatta, the most conspicuous craft was his ungainly, two-funnelled yacht *Hohenzollern*. His racing-cutter, *Meteor*, with himself on board, was seen competing for the Queen's Cup against the Prince of Wales's *Britannia*. The spectators cheered him as heartily as they would have cheered the Australians at Lord's, little dreaming what tremendous issues hung upon the success of these visits, or of the friction and bitterness that were engendered beneath the smiling surface.

For uncle and nephew, Prince and Emperor, were of all people the least fitted by temperament to hit it off together, and neither had the wisdom to realize that their failure to do so might be paid for, ultimately, in millions of lives. No doubt the Emperor, with his vanity, his aggressive tactlessness, and his fundamental unreliability, must have been a sore trial to

his uncle. But the Kaiser's was a temperament to respond to judicious humouring, particularly on the romantic side, for he was never more happy than when he was acting some romantic part, dressing up in the admiral's uniform, as he called it, of St. Vincent and Nelson, or—if he had only been allowed—kilted and bonneted at the head of a Highland regiment too well disciplined by centuries of Calvinist tradition so much as to grin.

But there was no spark of romance in Albert Edward's composition, nor in that of the Premier, Lord Salisbury. The impulsive, emotional Kaiser found himself baffled and repelled by that same quality that has conduced so much to the misunderstanding of Englishmen abroad, the chilling, but polite, unresponsiveness of the English gentleman. Albert Edward had for long been the pattern and autocrat of gentility—his tact was proverbial, his word law in the little world of Society. And there was a blatancy about the nephew that jarred insufferably on the uncle's exquisitely-trained social sensibilities. It must not be forgotten that the Prince was by sympathy—and almost by adoption—a Parisian. The nephew's Teutonic heaviness of touch must have added not a little to the uncle's irritation.

Unfortunately these two exalted incompatibles gave rein to their mutual antipathy as any private gentlemen might have done under the circumstances. The Kaiser spoke of his uncle as an old peacock, and even twitted him, to his face, with ignorance of soldiering. The Prince was hardly more reticent, for in conversation that was bound to be repeated, he made sarcastic reference to the withered arm, and in 1895 intimated that the Kaiser's presence had made the Regatta so distasteful to him that he probably would not come again. The Kaiser did not come again for the Cowes Week, though his new yacht, *Meteor II*, which he had had specially built to outclass the

Britannia, accomplished his purpose so well in 1896 that the Prince—though it is hard to condemn the Kaiser's action, even by English standards, as unsportsmanlike—retired from active participation in yacht-racing altogether.

But before this last episode, the chronic irritation had culminated in an explosion that shattered for ever the Anglo-German entente symbolized by the Cowes visits. Dr. Jameson's raid on the Transvaal, disavowed by the British Government, had been launched and failed. Suddenly, without warning, the Kaiser must needs startle the world by a congratulatory telegram to President Kruger couched in terms of studied provocation to England. It is uncertain to this day in what proportion the responsibility for this insane outburst must be shared between the Kaiser and his ministers, or what hand the sinister Holstein may have had in its composition, but its effect was decisive. Things—as Alan Breck would have put it—had been said that could not be passed over. The press of both countries, in the genial spirit of up-to-date nationalism, did everything it could to present the matter in the worst possible light. England—so the *Morning Post* informed her—would never forgive this insult, and the *Saturday Review* actually got as far as *Germania delenda est.*[1] The country found itself suddenly face to face with the prospect of war with Germany, a hitherto unbelievable contingency. A flying squadron was hastily fitted out. But though further provocation was threatened, it was not offered, and the war-cloud dissolved as quickly as it had arisen. Yet the memory of the Kaiser's telegram remained, and there could never again be a question of his figuring at Cowes Week. From that time forth the virus of mutual hatred and distrust began to infect two countries whose plainest interest it was to co-operate

[1] *Edward VII*, by Sidney Lee, Vol. I, p. 723.

in keeping the peace and forwarding the work of civilization.

Amid all the excitement, the wisest word spoken was by the old Queen. The real greatness of her nature, which had been under eclipse during the period of her Russophobiac obsession and her tantrums against Gladstone, shone out as clear as when she had restrained the uplifted hand of Germany in 1875, and supported her dying husband, in 1861, in averting the catastrophe of an Anglo-American conflict. Her eldest son, furious, like the rest of his family, with the telegram, appealed to her to give the offender "a good snubbing". But "these sharp cutting answers and remarks", replied the Queen, "only irritate and do harm, which one is sorry for. Passion should be most carefully guarded against. William's faults come from impulsiveness, as well as conceit. Calmness and firmness are the most powerful weapons in such cases."[1] And accordingly she sat down to pen a letter to her grandson in terms of such affectionate sorrow that it elicited an agitated reply, that almost amounted to an apology, and certainly to an impassioned plea for Anglo-German friendship. But the Prince, his biographer informs us, "read his nephew's apologia with impatience". It was this willingness, on both sides, to suspect, if not to believe, the worst, that was henceforth to govern the relations between England and Germany. The Kaiser's overtures were henceforth to arouse, if anything, greater resentment than his openly hostile moods.

[1] Ibid., p. 724. The last volume of the Queen's letters, published as this goes to press, contains the record of an attempt of hers, at this time, to curb the highly profitable nationalist hysteria of the Fourth Estate. "Could you not hint to our respectable papers", she writes to her Prime Minister, "not to write violent articles to excite the people? These newspaper wars often tend to provoke war, which would be too awful." "Would be" has become "has been".

Unfortunately this spirit was not peculiar to England and Germany. It was a disease that was infecting the whole of civilization, causing the international temperature to rise to a fever heat, with danger of ultimate collapse. The fact was that while everybody was boasting of being up to date, the whole system by which the world was governed was hopelessly, fatally, out of date. With civilization becoming every year more international, with the world drawing together into a single economic unit, the last resort of human wisdom was to set up an uncontrolled anarchy of nations and nationalisms, and to employ all the resources of science to make that anarchy more deadly. Hatred was now engendered by scientific mass-suggestion, commerce was choked by scientific tariffs, " backward peoples " were bled white by scientific exploitation, and the ultimately inevitable suicide of war would be rendered scientifically complete.

So that the best that even a Bismarck could do, by the diplomatic finesse of which he was master, was to maintain an unstable equilibrium, and the worst that the homunculi who succeeded him could do was to hasten a catastrophe that—failing a higher order of wisdom than any dreamed of by the rulers and statesmen of that time—was bound to come sooner or later, and would be worse later than sooner.

CHAPTER II

THE VISION OF EMPIRE

A civilization out of control—that is what had come into being as the result of Man's conquest of nature. It was as if he had provided himself with a powerful motor car, and started it downhill without having discovered how to steer or stop it. To talk of civilized Man ordering his own destinies would have been meaningless, for men were accustomed to limit their unity, and even their thought, by frontiers. All they would do was to go on improving their machines, breaking every conceivable record for size, quantity, and speed, and trusting Progress, which was the new substitute for God, to guide the destiny that they could not command for themselves.

Towards the end of the century each of the leading nations becomes possessed of an irresistible urge to sprawl over as much of the earth's surface as possible. All sorts of reasons are assigned for this tendency, but it was hardly, in the last resort, a matter of reason. Europe flowed over Africa as the water of a burst dam floods over the plains. Society was bursting with its own unconsumed wealth, that took the form of capital hungrily seeking for employment. It was more than any statesman could do to prevent it finding its way to new markets, raw materials, higher dividends. Disraeli had cast a romantic glamour over this business of expansion; Gladstone had tried to call a halt—he had been drawn into the occupation of Egypt as a fishing boat into the maelstrom. Even Bismarck had not been able to oppose his will to the blind lust for colonies. He did not desire a foot more of territory

for his own "saturated Power" than she had got already, but, realist as he was, he forebore to kick against the pricks and himself launched Germany on an expansionist career. Russia, once the prey of the Golden Horde, was now turning the tables by possessing herself of the vast home-lands of the Tartars. France was pushing forward to conquests of which Napoleon had never dreamed. By the end of the century even peaceful America had planted her foot on the far side of the Pacific, and staked out her claim in the West Indies.

This is not the place to detail the story of British expansion in the last quarter of the century. What most concerns us is the change that is associated with that expansion in the minds of the British people. For the old-fashioned Victorians, though often robustly patriotic, had not the least wish to cover the map with red. That wish had been more felt in the eighteenth century, when colonies were regarded very much in the light of outlying estates, to be run for profit. The loss of the American colonies had effectually damped this old, crude idea of empire. Henceforth the tendency was rather to regard the colonies as resembling those of a Greek city, offshoots of the parent state destined to become entirely separate from her, and, as many people thought, the sooner the better. To the Liberal, independence was a good thing for its own sake; to the old-fashioned Tory, a colony that you could not rule was not worth the trouble and expense of keeping.

To the mid-century Victorian, Empire was a word that had no tendency to arouse any emotional response. About his right little, tight little island he could, on occasion, be robustly patriotic. But he liked to think of England as the champion of freedom and free-institutions. Palmerston, who perfectly represented the patriotism of the average, middle-class voter, posed as a knight-errant championing oppressed peoples all

over Europe and standing up for the real or fancied rights of every British citizen abroad. Nothing interested him less than the doings of those bearded and rather uncouth individuals with whom the Colonial Secretary was concerned. The Colonies were a dumping-ground for bad characters, a convenient receptacle for failures, a limbo to which the family black sheep could be consigned in default of a lethal chamber. To Dickens they represented that almost undiscovered country to which Mr. Micawber went and from which Abel Magwitch returned. They probably filled no larger place in the minds of his readers.

Every historian will have his answer pat to the question—why did England need colonies? But it is at least as important to know how it was that the individual Englishman came to need these same colonies, not for any considerations of high policy, but in the same instinctive way as the mother needs her child, because their possession—as he deems it—fills a void in his own being. To Dickens and his readers the colonies meant next to nothing; to Mr. Kipling and his readers they counted for at least as much as England herself. Why this change?

It had been the life-work of Dickens to compose a prose epic of English middle-class life. He was able to do this because he and his readers found in this life a source of inexhaustible interest. Mr. Pickwick and his friends are a company of middle-class Philistines turned loose in the England of the thirties, and their adventures have held generations of readers spellbound; Nicholas Nickleby is an ordinary, respectable young fellow sent out into that world to seek his fortune, and he does not need even a plot to make his saga fit to rank, in all but music, with that of Odysseus.

Matthew Arnold and, for that matter, Dickens himself, had dealt mercilessly with the self-satis-

faction of the British Philistine. But it is at least to be noted that the Philistine was able to stick out his stomach beneath his waistcoat with a glow of contented pride in his class and its way of life. This satisfaction was not destined to last. After the death of Dickens and within the lifetime of Arnold, a silent revolution had taken place. The old Philistia had faded out of date; a new Suburbia had risen in its place, whose inhabitants were anything but satisfied with either their class or the conditions of its existence. There was no longer the glorious variety of the Dickens world, but a genteel sameness, a refined monotony, that was fatal to the old God's plenty of character and incident. It is all to the credit of the black-coated city worker that he was unable complacently to harmonize his life with its conditions. He sought for a way of escape, if it was only a dream way.

We know what that way was for Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns. But what about Ponsonby himself, with his harassed expression and his mournfully draggling moustache? You can see that Society delights not him, that even duchesses leave him cold. What dreams has Ponsonby during the long hours of hanging on the outskirts of his wife's entertainments? Does his mind's eye behold a Ponsonby that might have been, riding slouch-hatted through the bush, with the moustache reinforced by a bristling beard, and his pockets bulging with nuggets, or perhaps beneath the palms, with a hookah at his lips and his arm round . . . but he catches Mrs. Ponsonby's eye, and hastily pours himself out another B. and S.

Ponsonby de Tomkyns was not the only person who felt the need for an escape from the monotony of everyday existence. There were not only office, but machine and factory workers, to whom life for the greater part of the week must have been extremely boring. It was this aspect of modern industrial life

that had driven William Morris into communism. He contrasted the joyous creativeness of the medieval craftsman with vain repetition imposed on the machine tender. No doubt the contrast was not quite so clear cut as Morris thought it. There is the pride of the driver in his engine, of the chauffeur in his car. But in the main, in the conditions of the *fin de siècle*, Morris was right. The average town worker fed better, was more securely housed, lived more hygienically than his medieval predecessor, but his work was less interesting and his life lacked the old colour and variety. As we shall see, he was constantly trying to compensate for this by the artificial excitement of sport, and the cruder joys of the public house. But he too might harbour in his bosom a craving for adventure, the longing so poignantly expressed in Mr. Kipling's *Mandalay*. He too might have ears to hear the Call of the Blood, and a heart to beat quicker at the thought of membership in a great Imperial race. The Empire might provide an even better excuse for getting excited than Ladas or Aston Villa.

It was only gradually that the desire to escape from the artificial conditions of modern life came to be associated with the Empire. Its first expression took the form of a craving for pure adventure for adventure's sake, without any imperial or even patriotic bias. The author whose genius rose highest on the crest of this wave was Robert Louis Stevenson, who was, significantly enough, like his friend Henley and like Nietzsche, a lifelong invalid, and thus had every reason for taking to himself a dream world of overflowing virility. Stevenson could not only spirit you away from everyday life with John Silver to Treasure Island, or with Alan Breck to the Highland moors and the *Forty-five*, but he was able to take the modern town and transform it into a fairyland. After reading him, you half wondered whether you might not see

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the devilish visage of Hyde beneath the top-hat of the next passer-by, or whether, if you stepped into a tobacconist's, you might not find Prince Florizel of Bohemia behind the counter.

Among the great literary adventurers of this time was Rider Haggard, who had been on the staff of Sir Theophilus Shepstone during the annexation of the Transvaal, and seized on the romantic possibilities that were still latent in the Dark Continent. The city worker rejoiced greatly to dream of discovering King Solomon's mines, and finding strange adventures in lands as yet untouched by civilization. He might have thrilled with a somewhat different emotion had he known the reality of King Leopold's rubber forests and Barney Barnato's diamond fields.

Somewhat later than this, Anthony Hope provided another way of escape from reality, into his land of Ruritania. With consummate art, he introduces us to an aggressively ordinary Englishman in surroundings to match, and suddenly transports him to the throne of a dream kingdom, compounded out of memories of Bismarck, of Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria, of the kidnapped Prince Alexander of Bulgaria, and of the dynastic intrigues that enlivened Russian court life in the eighteenth century. The ordinary Englishman finds himself entirely competent to deal with the situation; he is—as he probably always secretly thought he would be—more at home in his new job than his old; he proves a much better king than the real one, and had his author been bound by less rigid conventions, would certainly have presented His Majesty with a pair of antlers to wear instead of the borrowed crown. Ruritania became the parent of innumerable daughter nations.

Anthony Hope had merely told the ordinary man that he would acquit himself greatly if he had the opportunity. But Arthur Conan Doyle found a more subtle way of approach. He invited the

ordinary man to prove his capacities for himself. It was in 1887 that Conan Doyle first thought of improving on an idea of Edgar Allan Poe's, and creating an amateur detective with a superhuman power of analysis and deduction. This master adventurer is cunningly provided with an ordinary man as companion, an ordinary man so infra-humanly stupid as to flatter every reader with the notion that he himself must be possessed of extraordinary detective powers, since he can always see clearly the things that are hidden from Doctor Watson of Baker Street and Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard. Thus Ponsonby de Tomkyns, if he was still alive and solvent, could not only make his escape into a dream world of such crime as never was on sea or land, but he came into it with all the assurance of a super-detective expert.

It was only when, four years after his first appearance, the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes began to appear in Newnes's new illustrated monthly, the *Strand*, that their fame became world-wide. Henceforth it was magazines of this kind that catered most strenuously for the ordinary city-worker's craving for adventure. Sherlock Holmes was followed by numbers of similar supermen, though none of them were fit to hold a candle to Conan Doyle's hero. There was a wonderful person called Dr. Nikola, whose vast and mysterious powers never seemed to lead him to any particular goal, but in whose company a commonplace young man with a heavy moustache was dragged alive through endless hairbreadth escapes among throat-slitting Chinamen and Tibetan monks. There was Cutcliffe Hyne's Don Q, a hidalgo brigand, endowed with exquisite manners and cruelty, a head like a coot's, and a beak like a vulture's. There were super-criminals as well as super-detectives, men who laid at least a ghost a month, men who successfully contended with vampires and thought nothing of driving a stake through the heart of a

beautiful young lady. The task of providing an escape from the reality of modern life had, in fact, become a standardized and very paying industry during the last years of the century.

It took a man of outstanding genius to see the possibilities of imparting to this craving for any sort of a dream world a definitely imperial bias. It was in 1887 that a young English journalist in India, called Rudyard Kipling, published his *Plain Tales from the Hills*, and it was soon evident that this was no ordinary story-teller, but the pioneer of a new way in English literature. Whether it was an English way is another question.

What had Mr. Kipling to offer Mr. Ponsonby de Tomkyns and his clerk, more than his fellow creators of adventurous dream worlds? It would be one answer to say that he was a greater genius than any of them, with the doubtful exception of Stevenson. He had not only the gift of holding his reader spell-bound from the first sentence to the last, which—since the days, or rather the nights, of Scheherazade—has been the story-teller's crowning gift, but he was also a poet, some of whose lyrics are among the immortal things of literature, and who, like Burns, was able to speak lyrically to the hearts of quite ordinary people. He also possessed a mastery of detail reinforced by a memory not less phenomenal than that of Macaulay, that rendered every story and poem of his a separate *tour de force*, and his works in general a veritable encyclopædia of curious and exact knowledge.

But that is only part of the truth about Mr. Kipling's boon for Mr. Ponsonby de Tomkyns. He could take that tired soul out of itself and set it under the palm-trees by the Mulmein Pagoda, or out of harm's way in face of the enemy's guns wheeling into line and shaking their bustles like Mrs. Ponsonby and her friends, or again he could conduct him into the

bowels of a liner in an Atlantic gale, and teach him to overhear what the different mechanical parts were saying to one another. But he did not stop short at showing Ponsonby, and Ponsonby's clerk, these strange new realms and the glory thereof. All these things would he give to them—and they should never know that the gifts were those of a dream. Ponsonby should crown his brows with the hundred-millionth part of a diadem; the clerk should become the minute fraction of an Emperor; both should realize their membership of a great Imperial race.

and Ivan Stepanovitch Ponsonbowskys, busily engaged in realizing their respective memberships of their own great Imperial races. They too were sons of the Blood, they too were of the greater breed within the Law, and were generously ready to apply what force might be necessary to bring lesser breeds within that charmed circle.

Blood and Iron had been Bismarck's formula; Mr. Kipling's way was one of Blood and Law, but the law was an iron law, the pack law of wolves in the jungle, the Robot law of nicely adjusted machinery, the obedience and discipline of the barracks. It was the exact negation of the old English Common Law, founded as it was upon respect for individual rights and liberties. It was the denial of everything for which the English Liberals had stood, and for which Victorian England had stood, in the great days of the mid-century.

It was the denial not only of the old law, but of the old righteousness. It was *not* that Mr. Kipling despised morality, but that he was the prophet of another morality of force and obedience, the *morality* of a chosen people like Israel, of a conquering breed

beautiful young lady. The task of providing an escape from the reality of modern life had, in fact, become a standardized and very paying industry during the last years of the century.

It took a man of outstanding genius to see the possibilities of imparting to this craving for any sort of a dream world a definitely imperial bias. It was in 1887 that a young English journalist in India, called Rudyard Kipling, published his *Plain Tales from the Hills*, and it was soon evident that this was no ordinary story-teller, but the pioneer of a new way in English literature. Whether it was an English way is another question.

What had Mr. Kipling to offer Mr. Ponsonby de Tomkyns and his clerk, more than his fellow creators of adventurous dream worlds? It would be one answer to say that he was a greater genius than any of them, with the doubtful exception of Stevenson. He had not only the gift of holding his reader spell-bound from the first sentence to the last, which—since the days, or rather the nights, of Scheherazade—has been the story-teller's crowning gift, but he was also a poet, some of whose lyrics are among the immortal things of literature, and who, like Burns, was able to speak lyrically to the hearts of quite ordinary people. He also possessed a mastery of detail reinforced by a memory not less phenomenal than that of Macaulay, that rendered every story and poem of his a separate *tour de force*, and his works in general a veritable encyclopædia of curious and exact knowledge.

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If Ponsonby had been a well-travelled man, it might have occurred to him that he had heard much the same sort of thing elsewhere. For all over the civilized world there were von Ponsonbys, and du Ponsonbys, and Ivan Stepanovitch Ponsonbowskys, busily engaged in realizing their respective memberships of their own great Imperial races. They too were sons of the Blood, they too were of the greater breed within the Law, and were generously ready to apply what force might be necessary to bring lesser breeds within that charmed circle.

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like that of Rome. It was Antichrist in its implicit denial of meekness, of gentleness, of the law whose fulfilling is love. Mr. Kipling's men are ashamed to show even such feelings as they may possess, and womanly tenderness is completely and significantly absent from his writing—his very few successful female creations are of a virile type. Even his language is ingeniously roughened, with "ho!" and "ha'ye?" and "Gawd".

Ponsonby de Tomkyns and the clerk in his office received the new gospel with gladness. Surbiton delighted not them, nor Balham neither. When they were offered the dominions of the Empire and the glory thereof, even in a dream, they did not boggle at the conditions. What should it profit England if she were to gain the whole world and lose her own soul? There would be statisticians galore, in the coming years, to cast up an account of that profit in £ *s*. *d*. But Ponsonby and his clerk—thanks to Mrs. Ponsonby and Ponsonby respectively—had long ceased to call their souls their own. Joyfully they took up the White Man's Burden, lustily they roared the choruses that the music halls provided for them, cheerfully they trooped to the polling booths to renounce Gladstone the Righteous and all his works, and follow the eyeglass and orchid of him who not so long ago had been "Jack Cade", but who was now enshrined in their hearts as Joe.

Mr. Kipling's was, like Disraeli's, a clean and manly conception of Empire, for he was at least enough of a Victorian to be a romantic at heart. If he believed in the Blood, it was not as the vampire or the money-bug believes in it. He did genuinely desire the welfare, if not the freedom, of those subject to the Law. Even the old nine-fifteen to the City trailed clouds of smoke and glory in his mind's eye, but romance did not come up, even to him, with nine and a quarter per cent. *in* the City. He liked to see

Sergeant What's-his-name drilling Pharaoh, but he had a blind eye for Sir Moses What's-his-name feathering his nest out of Pharaoh's taxes. In spite of all his knowledge of life, his imperial muse inspired him to songs of innocence, and not once to such songs of experience as Blake might have written, and as Wilfred Scawen Blunt, a vastly inferior poet to Mr. Kipling, did write about our occupation of Egypt.

After all, English imperialism, at its worst, was as clean and manly a thing as courage and devoted service could make it. The bard of experience, if he ever arose, would never be able to write of England on such a note as:

> King Leopold was in his parlour
> Counting out the money . . .

followed by

> Ten million natives sent below,
> Praise Mammon!

But there was an alternative conception of Empire, not fashionable in the nineties, but which might be destined to outlast that founded on Blood and Law, on force and exploitation. It had been foreshadowed by Disraeli himself in one of his inspired word coinages—"*Imperium et Libertas*"—"Empire and Freedom". It was the idea of a Commonwealth of Nations, whose only bond was one of the spirit, and whose informing principle that of free co-operation. Such a Commonwealth might be the prelude and pattern to an even wider union, embracing the whole civilized world.

CHAPTER III

THE TRIUMPH OF UNIONISM

The secession of the Liberal Unionists and the emphatic condemnation pronounced by Parliament and the constituencies against Home Rule in 1886 had a shattering effect on the Liberal Party. It also produced a new grouping of political forces whose significance was obscured by the fact that nominally everything remained as before. Much the same thing had happened to Liberalism as had happened to Puritanism at the Restoration. Charles II had pronounced Dissent to be no faith for a gentleman. Queen Victoria had come to hold much the same opinion about Gladstonian Liberalism. And yet at the beginning of her reign her sympathies had been notoriously Whiggish—even to the extent of keeping the Tories out of office for a couple of unnecessary years.

The heads of the great Whig Houses, so long as they remained faithful to the Liberal Party, gave that party a certain *cachet* of aristocratic distinction. What was good enough for Chatsworth or Woburn was good enough for Acacia Villa or even Horseback Hall. There was no reason why a rich man or a great landowner should belong to one party rather than the other. From the Long Parliament to the first Reform Bill, every subversive movement had had aristocratic leaders. Even while they were plundering the common lands and shifting taxation from their own shoulders to those of the people the Whig magnates were eloquent in support of liberty and constitutional principles. They had no idea of these desirable things ever affecting their own pockets or privileges.

Of late, however, they had been conscious that Mr. Gladstone was stirring up the mob in an unprecedented and highly dangerous fashion. It was not so much what he actually proposed as the spirit he breathed. His championship of liberty was so unrestrained, and his methods so unashamedly demagogic, that politics were ceasing to be the old gentlemanly game. There was already a vague sense of peril ahead, a fear of the consequences if these new millions of voters should be incited to take the law and its making into their own hands. More and more it was coming to be suspected that those who excited class feeling for political purposes were playing with the fires of social revolution. As the Queen wrote to her eldest son, " The mischief Mr. Gladstone does is *incalculable*; instead of *stemming* the current and downward course of Radicalism, which he could do *perfectly*, he *heads and encourages it* and alienates all true Whigs and moderate Liberals from him." [1]

The position of the Conservative Party, after it had come into power with the support of the Liberal Unionists, was clear. It was the rallying-point for all those who desired to see the existing framework of society preserved substantially intact. The feeling promoted by the Primrose League, that it was the only party to which any gentleman or patriot could possibly belong, was immensely strengthened. The House of Lords, now continually reinforced by putting the peerage up to sale, was overwhelmingly Unionist. There were still a number of rich men who contributed to the funds of the Liberal Party and looked to it for their reward, but more and more the moneyed interest was tending to identify itself with the seceding Whigs.

And yet it cannot be said that the government of Lord Salisbury stood for a policy of blind reaction. In the all-important matter of social reform, the Tories

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had a decidedly more fruitful record than their rivals, whose main efforts had been centred on political reform. The Premier was a Tory of the Tories, but he was also a thorough Englishman in his dislike of abstract principles and determination to get on with the business in hand without bothering about dogmas, Tory or otherwise. Certainly the work of government proceeded, under his auspices, with more smoothness and success than had attended Gladstone's ministry of 1880. Though the expansion of the Empire went rapidly on and the navy was strengthened, the peace was on the whole maintained. A good deal of useful legislation was passed for social betterment, on such varied subjects as housing, sanitation, shop hours, the provision of allotments, the grant of free education, the improvement of factories, and the restraint of sweating, while the Government broke loose from all Tory tradition in transferring the administrative functions of the once all-powerful Justices of the Peace to elected County Councils. The great representative of Tory Democracy, Lord Randolph Churchill, had soon contrived to quarrel with Lord Salisbury, and to the amazement of the whole country, had left the ministry, but the presence of Chamberlain as an ally, though not yet as a colleague, was a continual incentive to a forward social policy.

The problem of Ireland remained as far from solution as ever. Lord Salisbury believed that he could solve it by twenty years of benevolently firm government. But for firm government to have a chance, it would have been necessary to apply it in the good old Roman way, without any nonsense about free institutions. That solid phalanx of Irish members at Westminster was a perpetual reminder that Ireland, which had dictated her terms to Gladstone in 1886, would assuredly sooner or later hold another English administration in the palm of her hand. And even

Lord Salisbury would never have dreamed of being logical in his firmness, and reducing Ireland—or the Catholic part of it—to the status of a Crown Colony. Nor, even so, would it have been conceivable that the people with the longest and bitterest collective memory—except that of the Jews—upon earth, would have been cured of it by twenty years of alien coercion, however benevolent.

The Liberals were at least true to Liberal principles in declaring for the right of Ireland to govern herself. But they had—no more than the Tories—thought out what those principles logically implied. What guarantee had they that Ireland would freely consent to remain bound by an arrangement that still restricted her freedom in many important respects? Why should they remain loyal at all to the English connection and the English Queen? The tradition of Catholic Ireland was no more than that of Poland, one of loyalty to her conquerors. Most Irishmen were brought up on stories of English oppression—unforgotten memories of the Black Famine, of the Hessians and Yeomanry in 1798, of the penal laws, of Drogheda, of "Hell or Connaught". If an Irish Parliament, freely elected, should declare for independence—would Liberalism be prepared to stamp out that independence by force of arms?

And again, what was this Ireland to which it was proposed to grant freedom? If it had been just a nation, the logical application of Liberal principles would have been clear, whether or not it had been practical politics. But the Irish Nationalists would be content with no measure of freedom that did not include the whole of Ireland, and by nothing short of armed conquest could such "freedom" be conferred on the Protestant North-East. This opposition of two impossible policies revealed the utter inadequacy, to modern conditions, of Parliamentary institutions inherited from an age of cruder requirements. There

was, in literal truth, no conceivable way of escape, under the prescribed conditions, from ultimate deadlock and the substitution of violence for policy. There was not even the possibility of a loyal party man imparting wisdom to his rhetoric on the subject.

Meanwhile the Conservative Unionists had six years in which to apply their nostrum of a firm policy. This was done under the auspices of Lord Salisbury's philosophic nephew, Arthur Balfour, who reduced Ireland to some semblance of quiescence, but came no nearer to securing her contentment or loyalty under the Union. Meanwhile a disaster—which did not in the least, however, alter the essentials of the situation—had overtaken the Irish cause. Parnell had fallen, and in his fall had split the party. He had immensely gained in prestige by the attempt of no less a newspaper than *The Times* to saddle him with the guilt of countenancing murder, on the strength of some alleged letters of his that were proved to be forgeries. But his triumph was shortlived, for in the same year, 1890, in which the Commission appointed to investigate the charges against him issued its report, he was convicted, in the Divorce Court, of having violated the taboo on illicit sexual relationships. That Ireland should cast off her patriot leader who had brought her in sight of the Promised Land, because a love affair of his, which had long been suspected, had come to the light of day, might well have seemed beyond the limits of human absurdity. But the Catholic Church was adamant on questions of sex, and Gladstone, who for years had turned a Nelson eye to Parnell's liberties with the Decalogue, had his conscience roused into violent action by publicity. Parnell was hounded into a premature grave, and even his death did not prevent Parnellite and anti-Parnellite candidates from fighting each other for constituencies all over Catholic Ireland.

It was sensational, it was tragic, but it had no more than a personal significance. Politically, Ireland

stood exactly where she had stood before Parnell's fall. She had her phalanx of members at Westminster, who, even if they fought among themselves in the good old Donnybrook way, could be trusted to unite when it was a question of squeezing or coercing John Bull. It amounted to this: so long as there was a majority of a hundred or more of one English party over the other, the most that the Irishmen could do was to make themselves a thorough nuisance. But if that majority dropped below an odd 85, they became the tail that wagged the Parliamentary dog.

This is what happened when Lord Salisbury went to the country in 1892. His government had done as well as could possibly have been expected of it, but the swing of the electoral pendulum came into play, and the Conservative Unionists found themselves in a reduced, but still substantial, English majority, and a smaller, but definite, British and Irish-Protestant majority of 41. When however the Nationalist vote, which was frankly hostile to England, was thrown into the scale, there was a majority against them of 41. But that majority was only conditional on the Liberals consenting to force through a Home Rule Bill whether England approved of it or not. And they were precluded from any statesmanlike or truly Liberal measure, because the sacrifice of the Protestants was a *sine qua non* of Nationalist support.

The Liberal Party was, at this time, by no means sure of its own principles. Gladstone, whose tendency to concentrate on the subject that immediately interested him had strengthened with advancing years, had ceased to think much about anything but his crusade for Home Rule. But his followers, with the Whig brake taken off, were conscious that Liberalism ought to stand for democratic progress. The tendency of the middle class to join the upper in the Tory fold was becoming even more pronounced, and it was evident that a counterpoise must be sought in the support of the

newly enfranchised masses. But that support was not to be obtained from the sort of progressiveness for which the old-fashioned Radicals had stood, and which had comprised free trade, free competition, and a free hand for the capitalist. The possibilities of political reform had dwindled with every fresh achievement. What the working class wanted was not political but social reform. Not more than an insignificant fraction of it was as yet infected with the teachings of Marx and Henry George, but what, after all, was the use of commanding the State if it could do nothing for you? The working man was seldom a theorist, but he would have liked to see more of the good things of life come his way, and he would be prepared to support the politicians who would be most likely to deliver him such goods.

What were the Liberals going to do about it? Were they to cut loose from their traditions and embark upon a programme of social reform calculated to outbid anything the Tories could, or would, offer? But the Liberal politicians were mostly rich or comfortably-off gentlemen, steeped in the tradition of Victorian individualism. It was inconceivable that Gladstone would ever have countenanced any proposal remotely savouring of Socialism. But then, if the Liberals could not compete with the Tories as the guardians of security, and would not outbid them as champions of progress, was it not possible—nay, certain—that they would eventually be outbidden themselves from the left? The workers might end by choosing representatives of their own class, inspired by their own ideals. The few Labour members who had so far been elected were, indeed, content to range themselves humbly on the left wing of the Liberal array—but signs were already apparent that workers of advanced views were hankering after completely independent representatives. In 1888 a Scottish Labour Party was formed with a hair-raising pro-

gramme that included an eight hours' day, nationalization of land and minerals, a steeply graduated income tax, not to speak of Home Rule all round, disestablishment of the Church, and abolition of the House of Lords.

The Liberals felt they had got to do something, though they were at a loss what to do. Accordingly, in 1891, they adopted, at Newcastle, an extraordinary patchwork programme, on the principle of giving what an actor might have called a bit of fat to each section of their supporters. They would disestablish the Church, not of England, but of Wales, and throw in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland as a makeweight. They would reform a House of Lords that was now incurably hostile to themselves; they would give Little Pedlington its own Parish Council; and since something must be done for the working man, they would cure his drunken habits by making it unlawful for him to drink his glass of beer in any district where a sufficient teetotal majority could be whipped up. Herbert Paul, himself a Liberal historian, gives it as his opinion that there have never been two more disastrous days in the history of his party than those on which this programme was adopted.

When Parliament met after the election of 1892, a scene was enacted fit to scandalize even those members who were inured to the antics of the Irishmen. There was a triumphal progress, headed by a brass band, to escort to the House a man of leonine appearance, shamelessly attired in cloth cap and tweeds. If he had arrived naked, he could hardly have created a greater sensation. It was Independent Labour entering the House in the person of Keir Hardie, who had been a messenger boy at the age of seven, and started on his career as a miner at that of ten. He had been Chairman of that most advanced Scottish Labour Party, and still held to its principles.

But legislators soon had other things to think about than Mr. Hardie's sacrilege. For the second time the Irish threw a Conservative Government out of office, and Gladstone, now Prime Minister at the age of 83, proceeded to honour his bond and introduce a second Home Rule Bill. The whole of an exceptionally long and bitter session, that of 1893, was occupied in what everybody, except Gladstone himself, must have realized to have been sheer waste of time. That an almost solidly Unionist Second Chamber would ever consent to a great constitutional change being forced through in this way was inconceivable. And yet Gladstone, with his flashing eye undimmed and his eloquence as splendid as ever, continued for night after night to dominate the House, while the Opposition exhausted every device to delay and obstruct progress. In the course of the proceedings the measure was so amended that the advantage to England promised by the exclusion of the Irish Party from Parliament was cancelled. Ireland was to have her own Parliament; she was also, except when a very large majority resulted from a General Election, to continue to dominate the English Parliament. The Protestants were to be presented with the choice—about which it was now apparent they would not hesitate—between submission and rebellion. As the summer waned towards autumn, feeling rose higher and higher. It was evident that Gladstone had found almost his debating match in the same Joseph Chamberlain, with his head like a spear and his intrusive nose, who had once been the rising hope of the stern, unbending Radicals. Chamberlain's Whistlerian capacity for infuriating his opponents led at last to a veritable riot on the floor of the House—cries of "Judas!" the exchange of blows, and the horror of Queen Victoria, who of course debited it to Gladstone. But the longest farce must draw to an end, and after 82 days of sound and fury signifying nothing, the Third Read-

ing was passed by a majority of 34, and a minority, as far as England and Wales were concerned, of 48.

At last came the turn of the Lords. Tenniel hit off the situation very happily when he drew a picture of the unhappy Bill, as Little Billee, standing on the deck of a ship between a Gorging Jack of Salisbury and a Guzzling Jimmy of Devonshire,[1] who, knife in hand, were saying

> "O Bill, we're going to kill and eat you,
> So undo the button of your chemie."

Indeed the Upper House was roused as it had never been since the Attainder of Strafford. It was the beginning of the partridge-shooting season, the grouse moors of the North were glorious with heather, and yet the hereditary legislators could for once suspend even these delights for the dull privilege of vetoing legislation. By the enormous majority of 378, the Bill was hurled out.

Gladstone, who was desperately in earnest about his Bill, would have gone to the country at once on the issue of the Peers versus the People. But his colleagues were only too glad to let the matter drop. Parnell, if he had been alive, might have insisted on the appeal being made, but there was no strength of leadership among the colleagues who had hounded Parnell to his doom. And the Liberals had an uneasy consciousness that on this occasion the Peers represented the People decidedly better than the Commons. The last thing they wished to do was to put the matter to the test of the ballot.

The Peers had won a brilliant—an almost too brilliant a victory. For it filled them, as a body, with that kind of insolent pride that the Greeks called "*hubris*". They were no longer content to be bound by the unwritten law of the Constitution that relegated their House, on vital issues of policy, to the

[1] Lord Hartington had now succeeded to his father's title.

position of sleeping partner. Like the Roman politicians of the century that preceded the fall of the Republic, they were determined to play the skin game for all it was worth. Henceforth the Upper Chamber was, to all intents and purposes, an annexe of the Conservative Central Office. Liberal Bills were ruthlessly mutilated or destroyed. It was only as part of the Budget that the Liberals could hope to pass any controversial legislation, and even this exception might not always be conceded. All this was thoroughly in accordance with the spirit of Machiavellian realism that had come to rule the domestic as well as the foreign politics of the civilized world.

For the present, however, the triumph of the Lords was complete. The Liberal Government, having publicly fought shy of accepting so defiant a challenge, could only accumulate discredit upon itself with every month that it remained in office. Gladstone, a crusader forsaken by his followers, made an impressive retirement from public life, to the undisguised joy of the mistress he had served for so many years of unrequited devotion. His place was taken by Lord Rosebery, a connection by marriage with the Rothschilds, a convinced imperialist of vast wealth and considerable attainments, who had somehow failed to change sides with Lord Hartington and the other Whig magnates, and was, not unnaturally, the choice of Queen Victoria, who could now at last breathe comparatively freely with a Liberal Premier in office. But so pronounced a champion of the Right commanded no loyalty in his party, and less than none among his Nationalist allies, since he expressed the opinion—which obviously fully vindicated the action of the Lords—that there could be no Home Rule without the consent of the "predominant partner" England.

The Government was now universally regarded as

moribund, and the Lords treated it and its measures with open contempt, though the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir William Harcourt, succeeded in raising the Death Duties in a manner highly distressing to the owners of landed estates. At length, in the summer of 1895, a snap division on a War Office vote gave the Liberals what was probably a welcome excuse for laying down the burden of office. Lord Salisbury promptly formed a strong government which now included the Duke of Devonshire, Chamberlain, and other Liberal Unionists. In the election that immediately followed the Liberals were not only defeated, but overwhelmed, the Unionist majority over all parties combined being 150—a triumph of which even Disraeli would never have dared to dream. Liberalism had virtually declared its own temporary bankruptcy; Labour had not yet arrived, and the field was clear for a policy of loyalty to the Throne and established institutions, of cautious progress towards social betterment, of a United Kingdom and an expanding Empire.

CHAPTER IV

GILDED LEISURE

Anything less Victorian, in the sense the word is generally used, than the last decade of the century, it would be difficult to imagine. The tempo of life had been speeded up out of all recognition since the sixties, and the coming of the motor-car merely gave outward and visible form to an inward and spiritual, or, more accurately, nervous change. Already it was becoming the fashion to make merry over the pomposity of those whiskered old boys in stove-pipe hats and dowagers in crinolines who had lorded it in the days of Albert the Good.

Society had utterly changed in the course of a generation. It was no longer that closed circle of the sixties. The *nouveaux riches* had been arriving, year after year, not single spies, but in battalions. The economic bottom of the old exclusiveness had been knocked out. The great landed estates had never emerged from the depression that the bad harvests of the seventies had begun, and the importation, on a vast scale, of agricultural produce had perpetuated. As the opportunities for making money on the land had diminished, those of doing so by commerce and speculation had increased. And now Belgravia was crowded with new arrivals to whom money was a romance and a key to unlock all pleasures.

In an age in which psychology had so signally failed to keep pace with the advance of other sciences, it was never suspected that it could be anything but simple to turn money into pleasure. Sir Gorgius Midas had retired from business with a fortune—he had only to

spend the money at his own free will to be, in the words of a popular song of this time,

> A splendid millionaire
> Without a single care.

Which of course had a certain element of truth in it, for undoubtedly Dives was freed from a good many harassing and sordid cares that afflicted Lazarus, and from which, in this world, Lazarus derived no sort of consolation, spiritual or otherwise.

But once he had contrived to feed and house himself in comfort, Dives began to find that the business of enjoying money was less in his line than that of making it. He could, of course, be like that other millionaire of Mr. Belloc's, who

> sat at table,
> *And ate like this as long as he was able,*

but even that had its inconveniences—the gentleman in question is reported to have died of gout—and what covers was Dives then to draw in his hunt for pleasure, or the progeny of Dives, launched on the world with enormous allowances and nothing to do but spend them? If they went to the survivors of the old, Victorian aristocracy for guidance, they would find that these portentous beings had bothered far less about pleasure, or even elementary comfort, than the dignity that they considered proper to their order. A nobleman's way of life was often Spartan in its simplicity, and a house party was an affair of rigidly enforced punctuality and perpetual tenterhooks. Bathrooms were exceptional, reading was done by the dim light of candles. In one ancient Welsh mansion, the family used to sit in the fifteenth-century hall, with its minstrels' gallery and figures in armour, and when, in winter, the front door was opened for the entrance of a visitor, in would pour an icy blast, often accompanied by snow. Of a Kentish nobleman, it is told that he shortened his life by the rather embarrassing habit of dressing at all

seasons on a sort of open-air platform in front of his room, and prolonging the process by reading his Bible.

Long before the nineties this sort of joyless formality had been going out of fashion. One of its last upholders was the Queen herself. Her court was to the last an abode of little ease and aristocratic exclusiveness. But the Prince of Wales had from the first committed himself to the pursuit of pleasure without sacrifice of dignity, and in spite of his mother's disapproval and the headshakings of the old-fashioned and Puritanical, the spirit of the time was working for him. It is idle to pretend that the proceedings of the Marlborough House set had been regarded with anything like universal approval. But the largely middle-class respectability to which these proceedings were obnoxious was rapidly on the wane, and with the new suburbans the example of the Prince had more weight than the fear of the Lord.

In 1890, the Prince's popularity was put to a supreme test. The whole country was thrilled with delighted horror at his second appearance in the witness box, this time in connection with one of the most sensational scandals on the record of Society. In the previous autumn the Prince had been staying with one of his rich friends, a shipowner called Wilson, for the Doncaster races. The house party had amused itself in the evening by playing at the Prince's favourite game of baccarat. Among the players was a Colonel of the Scots Guards, and this distinguished officer was accused by five of his fellow players and guests, who had constituted themselves an informal committee of amateur detectives, of having imparted a new and unorthodox element of skill into the game by surreptitiously increasing or withdrawing his stake. The matter had been referred to the Prince, and he had exacted from the Colonel a written undertaking never to play cards again, on the honourable understanding that none of the Five

should ever mention the matter. But one of them must have let the cat out of the bag, for the story got about; the Colonel was compelled to take action, though his previous undertaking was fatal to any chance he might have had of success.

The unfortunate Prince was the object of a perfect storm of censure. The whole Puritan feeling of the country was mobilized against him. The worthy Mr. Stead made an agonized computation of the number of petitions that had gone up in vain to Almighty God on behalf of Albert Edward Prince of Wales, though this would seem to have tended less to prove the wickedness of baccarat than the inefficacy of prayer. If all this had happened twenty years before, it might have involved serious consequences to the dynasty. But in this more tolerant time, the storm soon spent its force, and was succeeded by a reaction in the Prince's favour. Paradoxical as it may seem, we may date from this Tranby Croft affair the period of the Prince's final and almost unqualified popularity. In the nineties, there was no more satire about "The coming K——", or talk of a coming Republic. If Queen Victoria had been apotheosized as a mother-goddess, awful and aloof, the Prince had taken the place of one of those jolly, familiar gods, who, if not the most exalted in pagan religions, are certainly the most popular. He was Ganesh, he was Ho-Tei, he was the universal uncle. His smile, his cigar, even his stoutness—did not one great journal confide to the world his nickname of "Tum-tum"?—all contributed to the impression of good fellowship. The Music Hall played its part. To cite one typical song, in which the singer dreams that the Albert Hall is turned into a public-house:

> The Prince of Wales was chairman, of course he opened the ball,
> And sang the chorus of every song at the concert at Albert Hall,

being the sort of thing the Prince of popular legend would do. The cult had its phallic aspect, many of its most loyal adherents treating the Heir to the Throne as a butt for bawdy witticisms, some of which even found their way into the sporting press.

It was this largely imaginary Prince whose example the pleasure-loving, plutocratic society of the nineties delighted to follow as best it might. The Prince was regarded as a man of pleasure—for the serious side of him was not yet appreciated. He furnished the model for countless men about town—it was in fact the hey-day of such men, very correctly dressed, and leading an idle, often a parasitic existence, with a valet, and rooms at some such select location as the Albany.

Looking back on this time, one is struck by the almost incredible amount of leisure enjoyed by nearly all women and a great many men of the upper class. The description given by an advanced young lady, in *The Dolly Dialogues*, of poor Mr. Carter, the " I " of the story, is typical: " Nearly 40 . . . estate in the country. He never goes there except for a few days' shooting. He lives in town . . . he passes an absolutely vacant existence in a round of empty gaiety . . . if you want him you must look on a racecourse or at a tailor's, or in some fashionable woman's boudoir." That is exactly the impression you get from the fashionable drama of the time, particularly that of Mr. Pinero, of Henry Arthur Jones, and Oscar Wilde. We must make a certain allowance for the fact that the dramatist has to create the sort of dream world to which his readers most ardently want to be transported, but even so, that world has to be created with some regard for plausibility. And the impression one gets of Society is of an order of privileged beings among whom work, or any serious interest in life, is rather the exception than the rule, and who pass time in one unending

struggle to kill it, largely by the form of sexual stimulus known as flirtation.

There was—except perhaps where the Socialist leaven was beginning to work—nothing offensive to public opinion in the spectacle of this sort of existence. The young man with an eyeglass who, bouquet in hand, waited expectantly at stage doors, the "masher" or "Johnny", was the theme of innumerable songs, and was regarded with as much envy as amusement. That he was no figment of the imagination is indicated by the marriages of rich and titled young men with ladies of the stage, that provided the Press with an occasional mild sensation. For Society had discovered the art of publicity. Nothing would have been more beneath the dignity of the old-fashioned Society woman than to tout for the admiration of people who dwelt outside the charmed circle of her intimates. But a new spirit was growing as the old exclusiveness declined. Its first manifestation was the coming and reception of the professional beauty. Mrs. Langtry, the Jersey Lily, burst upon Society in the late seventies. She had excellent credentials, being the daughter of a Dean, a friend of the Prince of Wales, and an actress whose personal charm stood her in even better stead than her histrionic talent. The most exclusive mansions opened their doors to her, and she soon became the best advertised woman in England. In 1878 there were no less than three portraits of her in the Academy, by Weigall, Poynter, and the great Millais himself.

The professional beauty—if we may apply this term to the woman whose passport to Society consisted in her good looks and *chic* appearance—soon became quite a recognized institution. The names and doings of these lovely creatures were in everyone's mouth, and there was something heroic about the efforts they made to maintain their position in face of ferocious

and feline competition. But soon the competition ceased to be professional, for it is not in the nature of woman to resign herself to a second best in the matter of personal charm. Ladies of the bluest blood entered the arena, basked in the blaze of publicity, and enjoyed the friendship of the Prince of Wales. Quite early in the eighties portraits of fashionable women were not only in all the society journals, but on sale in the shops.

It had, in fact, become impossible for Society to keep to itself. Too urgent was the demand of the suburbs for news of those superior beings with whom every mistress of a villa liked to feel herself in mystic, sweet communion. And not only to the villas, but even to the slums, did the craze extend. One of the most famous of Phil May's pictures depicts two disreputable old flower women looking at a picture of " Lady Solsbury ", and deciding that it is not really like what she is in private.

Thus when the charmed circle broke up, as it had by the end of the century, and dissolved into a number of smaller circles or cliques, often quite unconnected with each other, the doings of Society became the property of the man in the street, or rather the woman in the suburban drawing-room. But such is the power of words, that this good lady remained under the illusion that the word Society must refer—as it did in the sixties—to some well-defined social group about which it was easy to make generalizations. It was a paying proposition for any journalist to supply news of the ways, the gossip, and the sins of Society, and such information was freely forthcoming. But nothing was said to dissipate the impression that the orgies that took place at Mrs. Golightly Ikestein's house parties were equally characteristic of Chatsworth or Lansdowne House.

But the very fact of Society ceasing to form one group, if it allowed for a complete change of manners

and standards, made also for the preservation of the old. It is the habit of the journalist to concentrate on the new and the sensational, and ignore that which goes on sedately in the old grooves. In the nineties, in spite of the epithet " naughty ", there were numerous *grandes dames* who, like the Queen herself, remained as staid and exclusive as any of the sixties, and kept their daughters as strictly chaperoned as they had been in their own youth.

So that the Society of fashionable plays and novels must be taken as referring to that left wing of the upper class that was most powerfully affected by the irruption of the new plutocracy. Here indeed a change was taking place that might fairly be described as revolutionary. Dignity was no longer the aim, but pleasure; exclusiveness was less accounted of than publicity. There was—as almost everywhere else in this bustling age—a feverish striving to be up-to-date. Even conversation had to be smartened up; it was the pose of the man or woman of the world to be serious about nothing, and vivaciously brilliant about everything. The brilliance has rather worn off now—one can hardly recapture the charm that was supposed to invest even such an ideal specimen as Mr. E. F. Benson's " Dodo ". In a modern drawing-room, one imagines, a woman who was perpetually playing the fool with such elaborate affectation as this extremely popular heroine would be voted not only heartless, but rather tiresome. And the type of flirtation that consisted in endless smart innuendo without ever coming to the point would hardly be understood nowadays. Modern Society has no place for middle-aged beaux like the Mr. Carter of the Dolly Dialogues, who passed most of their time dangling about the boudoirs of married women and engaging in bouts of verbal rapier play, with the points discreetly buttoned. The modern woman, if she was that way inclined, would want to cut all this cackle and get to business, if not,

she would intimate pretty plainly that her would-be swain was outstaying his welcome.

All this could only have taken place where money and leisure were equally abundant. Though it was no longer unthinkable for a gentleman to go into business, work was certainly not fashionable, and poverty a thing to be hidden at all costs. Now that birth no longer served to distinguish the elect of Society from outsiders, the importance of money was greatly enhanced. Sir Gorgius Midas might have been born in the gutter and have picked up his manners in the street, but he could vie with any duke in the lavishness of his entertainments. Now that the middle class was aping the dress and style of Belgravia, there was only one way in which the Society woman could assert her supremacy, and that was by taking full advantage of her money power. It was a time of lavish ostentation ; the scale of expenditure was everywhere forced up. The beautiful evening dresses, or trailing robes, of this time afforded endless opportunities for adornment, and there were many women who would have scorned to be seen twice in the same dress. Even the tips that were expected at great houses made the hospitality of rich relations an often prohibitive luxury.

There was never a time when the doings of this so-called Society were invested with such a halo of romance as towards the end of the century. This was only natural, now that Belgravia had become the dream paradise of the Suburbs, and now that its portals were invitingly open for the reception of those who, in an age of opportunity, contrived to accumulate a sufficient bank balance, or even to achieve enough kudos for lionization. Every city-goer carried a coronet in his gladstone.

Accordingly the novelist, the dramatist, and the portrait painter vied with one another in creating just such a dream world as that which was demanded of

them. We have already met with typical denizens of this world in Dodo and Dolly; such were Pinero's Gay Lord Quex and Duke of St. Olphetts, well-preserved bucks who, having devoted the whole of their lives to the languid enjoyment of mistresses, now bask in a maturity of charm, epigram, and cynical wisdom. It was in this fairyland that George Alexander loved to figure as the Prince Charming—and how many bosoms must have fluttered responsive to his "Little girl!"

Of course the fashionable portrait painter depended for his bread and butter on his skill in making his sitters see in the canvas exactly what they would have liked to see in the looking-glass. But there was one of real genius, Sargent, who aspired to be the Vandyck, the Gainsborough, of this world. Sargent was too great an artist to compromise with the truth, as he visualized it, either for gain or fame. But he idealized the old British nobility with a seriousness that proclaimed a countryman of Little Lord Fauntleroy. Charm and breeding were to him almost inseparable from birth; he laid them thick on to his sitters. It is hardly possible to look at his portrait of Lord Ribblesdale without involuntarily beginning to hum the refrain, "He's a fine old English gentleman", and as for some of his ladies, the very canvas exhales such distinction that one feels it an impertinence to stare. But when Sargent had to paint not birth, but money, there was a very different tale to tell. His brush became tipped with venom, and figures appeared on the canvas that might have been expressly designed for purposes of Red propaganda. The fact that these merciless interpretations were received with gladness and guineas may not inconceivably be evidence of a greatness of soul in the patron connoisseur commensurate with that of the artist.

Even Sargent did not create so rosy an impression of Society as Oscar Wilde. It was Wilde's deliberate

purpose, as an artist, to create a world completely divorced from reality, but it is doubtful whether he realized how far he was doing this in his own life. In one sense he might be called a snob, for his ideal world was obviously one peopled almost entirely by aristocrats—to judge by his writings it would seem as if he had dipped his pen in blue blood. But he was too great an artist to be content, like an ordinary snob, with any stupid or commonplace person who happened to have a title. He would, by his prerogative as one of the kings of letters, create his own aristocracy, and people his dream world with Lord Darlington, Lord Henry Wootton, Lord Goring, Lord Arthur Savile, and the rest of them. The deficiencies of an ordinary nobleman's education were nothing to Wilde—he would easily make that good—and if he had once defined a foxhunter as the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable, and knew perfectly well that the aristocracy were foxhunters to a man, he also knew that art is not bound by the laws of syllogism. The world of fact and logic might go hang—his aristocracy should radiate intellectual beauty.

Unfortunately the real Wilde wanted to move in a world of real lords, and by sheer force of genius he partially achieved his purpose. But he had to take his lords as he found them and not as he dreamed them, and it was one of these who brought about his expulsion from the dream world into a most sordid and pitiful reality. This was the Marquis of Queensberry, a personage of some importance in his day, and remembered by the Queensberry Rules that even now govern boxing contests. He was one of those rich men about town who are now almost an extinct species, but in those days lived out their lives with a superb indifference to public opinion. He once travelled to Homburg for the express purpose of thrashing the Foreign Secretary, Lord Rosebery, and it needed all the well-known tact of the Prince of Wales

to prevent him from carrying out his fell intent.[1] On another occasion he got himself bound over for fighting one of his sons in Piccadilly. This son had asked the father to stop writing obscene letters to his, the son's, wife, and the Marquis had "replied by making a noise with his lips", whereupon both noblemen had fallen on with a will. And when a few years later the father lay on his death-bed, he remained game to the last, and since striking was out of the question, belched at the son in question, when he came to pay his final respects.[2] He was a critic of the drama—he had taken on himself to denounce a play of Tennyson's from the stalls, and he had unsuccessfully tried to present a first-night bouquet of carrots to Oscar Wilde. If we may judge from his youngest son's account, he must have been as "gay" as Lord Quex himself, and no unworthy successor of "Old Q."[3]

Such was the nobleman who, on moral grounds, set himself to compass the downfall of Wilde at the height of his fame and genius. For the real Wilde was not only the bright irresponsible creature that the world knew, but also a man afflicted by a terrible craving, the seeds of which may have been planted before birth. Only the sternest self-control could have kept him from violating the most sacred taboos of the society in which he lived, and moral restraint Wilde rejected on æsthetic principle. His case was one not for the judge, but the doctor. Far from corrupting anyone's morals, he himself fell a victim to the very dregs of mankind, who battened upon his weakness for money and betrayed him for more money. These were the myrmidons whom the gay Lord Queensberry marshalled against his enemy, and Wilde, exposed as a wallower in unmentionable filth, received a sentence which, like the old flogging round the fleet, was hardly more merciful than one of death. Society purged

[1] *The Autobiography of Lord Alfred Douglas*, p. 92.
[2] Ibid., p. 95.
[3] Ibid., pp. 91–3, 100.

itself of his memory, and his very name became, for a season, an indecency and a bawdy jest.

And yet the idealized version of Society which Wilde had done so much to create was complacently accepted as the image of the real thing.

CHAPTER V

THE HOME UP TO DATE

One of the stock things to say about the æsthetic movement is that it brought about a great improvement in standard of taste, and that the *fin de siècle* was consequently a sweeter, brighter period than that which had preceded it. To me the proposition seems doubtful.

The old, Puritan Philistinism, against which Matthew Arnold had inveighed, had indeed gone out of fashion. A certain veneer of culture was even considered *chic*, at any rate for ladies. If there was any complaint against art, it was that its newest manifestations and devotees were unmanly. The term "decadent" was a good deal employed as one of abuse capable of being applied to any artist more advanced than Leighton or any poet less orthodox than Tennyson. There was an outbreak of triumphant manliness at the time of the Oscar Wilde trial, and it was not obscurely hinted that any new path remotely capable of being described as æsthetic ought to lead straight to the jail.

In spite of this Philistine counter-offensive, the *fin de siècle* made no exception of taste in the general up-to-dateness on which it plumed itself. The days had gone in which the great middle class had confined its energies, in defiance of scriptural precept, to the combined service of the Lord and Mammon. It had also begun to honour the muses, after its fashion. The greatly increased amount of leisure that its womenfolk enjoyed enabled them to seek self-expression through their homes as well as their clothes. Even in country

houses, there were faint strivings after the light, and ladies who liked to come back from a hard day with the hounds to a pretty drawing-room.

Then, too, there was no lack of guidance. The æsthetes had at least pointed out the grosser errors in taste perpetrated by the Victorians. Horsehair sofas, oleo portraits, wax flowers, and pictures on looking-glasses were banished to cottage parlours and the sitting-rooms of lodging-houses. There was a conscious striving after æsthetic effect, not only in interior decoration, but in architecture itself. The apostle of beauty was no longer a voice crying in the wilderness. Everybody with any pretentions to culture read and reverenced Ruskin. The efforts of William Morris to revive a Gothic standard of craftsmanship were duly honoured, and its products eagerly sought for by those to whom his communist principles were anathema. An arts-and-crafts movement was already on foot in the nineties. And even Whistler, in spite of his openly expressed contempt for the British public, had at last been taken to its heart, and had become one of those of whom it was almost obligatory to speak well.

In spite of the Philistine and academic old guard, there was no longer the former Victorian veto on everything advanced. The outcry provoked by the special circumstances of the Oscar Wilde trial was essentially reactionary—the spirit of so consciously up-to-date an age was like that of St. Paul's Athenians, who were constantly on the look-out for anything new. It was not opposition but indifference, and still more, ignorance, that art had to fear. An increasing number of both sexes found in muscular orgies an agreeable substitute for pleasures more refined. And those who did "go in", as they would probably have expressed it, for art, were, in the true spirit of their time, inclined to accept anything flashy and self-advertising for good, and to confound quantity with quality.

If the development of art had been governed by purely æsthetic considerations, much that was undesirable might have been avoided. But there had never been a time when beauty had been to so large an extent the handmaid of commerce. It was easy for the art critic to propose—but it was the mass producer who disposed. This accounts for the comparative failure of William Morris to bring back his countrymen to the principles of sound and joyous craftsmanship that inspired work done under his immediate auspices. There was no lack of appreciation for William Morris products. But the mere fact that each of them was the result of individual skill, and that the workman is worthy of his hire, made them the comparatively rare luxuries of the well-to-do. And it was only too fatally easy for enterprising manufacturers to turn out, by machinery, and at a fraction of the cost, articles that were sufficiently "William Morrisy" to satisfy the demands of the purchaser who wanted her drawing-room to look "arty", and was compelled to effect this, if at all, on the cheap.

William Morris was a romantic who had never attempted to deal with the conditions imposed by the triumph of machinery. He averted his eyes in horror from the nineteenth century and all its works, and sought refuge in a highly sentimentalized reconstruction of the Middle Ages. But it was no more practicable to get back from Victoria to John Ball, than it would have been for John Ball to have inscribed upon his banners, "Back to Stonehenge!" All that came from the refusal of leaders like Ruskin and Morris to countenance any new materials or new methods was that those who exploited such novelties were without any guidance and often without the self-respect that comes from the consciousness of good work worthily performed.

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construction were beginning to be realized; new building materials were coming into use; but these things were still outside the realm of architecture. The architects had assimilated all that the Victorian Age had to teach, but they had singularly little to say. Many of them were still engaged in trying to put the new wine into old bottles, often with disastrous results. It is interesting to contrast the Forth Bridge, completed in 1889, with the Tower Bridge, completed five years later. The elder bridge is a piece of engineering pure and simple, and by sheer constructional frankness achieves dignity and a certain beauty. The other can only be described as a ludicrous caricature of a medieval drawbridge, between two towers which look as if they had been got out of a badly-illustrated modern edition of the *Morte d'Arthur*.

It is true that the Gothic Revival, of which this was one of the last manifestations, had gone out of architectural fashion, but this merely set the architects delving into the past for new styles to copy. As an alternative to Gothic, a style was evolved called "free classical", and whose freedom served as a cloak for all kinds of decorative extravagance, while to quote from Percy Fitzgerald's *Picturesque London*, published in 1890, "The so-called Queen Anne style has within the last few years displayed itself in every shape of extravagance, running riot, as it were, in fantastic freaks of brick. Entirely new quarters, as in the regions close to Sloane Street, have sprung up, entirely covered with these singular edifices. They seem to be dark, uncomfortable tenements, with peaks and gables of the most elaborate kind, and are certain to require constant repairs." It seems almost incredible that a style whose whole merit lay in its constructional simplicity could be thus perverted.

But Queen Anne was dead, and the architectural manners of the *fin de siècle* were utterly incapable of reserve. The main purpose of the average building

was to show itself off to the greatest advantage, and usually in a suit of clothes borrowed from a museum. It would be difficult to point to any building of outstanding merit dating from this period, though numerous ornate public edifices were run up, and fine, showy country houses, preferably with turrets, eminently suited to the requirements of the new rich.

It was during these years that huge seaside hotels began to form a conspicuous feature of the landscape. These were usually of the new iron or steel construction, in order to achieve the largest possible size at the least possible expense, but since they were built to attract genteel guests, they had to be covered all over with ornamentation proper to brick or stone edifices along with such special improvements as violently gilded domes and pepper-pot lids.

It is in its villa architecture that the distinctive character of the period is most plainly revealed. It is a time of flimsy construction, the whole purpose of the building being apparently to give the maximum of veneer for the minimum of cash. Poky gables, finicky bow-windows, alternations of red and liver-coloured bricks, and obtrusive slate roofs serve to keep up an appearance of gentility. The cottages are villas in miniature, and look even more like dolls' houses. The utilitarian plainness of the sixties is quite discarded.

Inside mansion and villa alike, the almost universal desire to get the last farthing's worth of decorative effect played straight into the hands of the mass producer. It was a time of indiscriminate overcrowding. "Over-ornamented rooms", said Herbert Spencer, "are even more numerous than over-dressed women", and he instances "the numerous pretty things, or things supposed to be pretty, which burden the tables, the minor pieces of furniture, the brackets, and so on, including such absurdities as paper-knives with fret-work handles". He

diagnoses a low moral attitude, originating in a desire for applause so obvious as to lower him who shows it in the minds of others—in other words, blatant vulgarity usurping the place of taste.

To satisfy this instinct an enormous amount of cheap and showy knick-knacks were unloaded on the market, and every device of advertising was employed to convince purchasers that they were getting the very latest thing in household decoration—which, in a sense, they were. The popularization of photography provided all and sundry with a means of obtruding their existence hardly less distressing, in its effects, than that of initial-carving on ancient monuments. Frames of every kind were turned out to enshrine these attempts to look pleasant. Some were of silver, more of electro-plating, some of plush, some gilt, some painted, and they were all hung up, or stood up, screaming at each other like parrots in the Zoo. Then, as befitted an up-to-date age, there was a tremendous craze for novelties. A novelty was a device for effecting some very simple purpose, like that of striking a match or sharpening a pencil, in a highly elaborate and ornamental way. It was essential to a novelty that it should masquerade as something quite different from what it really was. Thus if you wanted to strike a match, you had a large pig framed in relief, and under him the legend "Please scratch my back." You then started rubbing your vestas against the pig, and with good luck you might get the fourth or fifth to ignite. To do our fathers justice, they did not buy novelties for their own use. The time for distributing them was at weddings, birthdays, and above all, at Christmas. They looked as if they had cost more than they had; they were usually sure of the applause that follows the latest conjuring trick; and they would soon be merged in an accumulation of similar objects without their uselessness being noted. For though nobody bought novelties for himself,

nobody ever thought of throwing them away so long as there was a cubic foot of space left for their reception. That would have been against all the instincts of the later Victorians. The more pretty things there were together the prettier the effect would be.

There has been such a complete clearance, or falling to pieces, of everything appertaining to the nineties, that it is difficult to convey any impression of an ordinary interior of that time, without being accused of wild exaggeration. I hope therefore, I may be excused for giving one or two concrete and typical instances of what was considered a smart and tasteful environment for ladies and gentlemen in that age of æsthetic endeavour.

My first specimen comprises one small corner of a small drawing-room, round about 1890. I have noted down the contents carefully from a photograph, and though my recollection of them is childish, most of the objects are things I remember quite sufficiently well. To start with the drapery, we have:

Huge velvet window curtains.

Heavy tapestry curtains of Persian design draping an arch.

Curtain of Eastern design, inlet with glass beads, draping a looking-glass.

Heavy drapery on the mantelpiece, also adorned with bits of glass.

Imitation Indian drapery looped over a Japanese screen.

Large armchair antimacassar with ball fringe.

Indian tablecloth on small knick-knack table.

Bit of Eastern drapery on the end of a couch.

A weird and nondescript bundle of drapery on a small table under two pots of ferns.

Another mass of drapery reflected in the looking-glass.

That is all the drapery—now we can get on with the other contents of the corner. These include:

diagnoses a low moral attitude, originating in a desire for applause so obvious as to lower him who shows it in the minds of others—in other words, blatant vulgarity usurping the place of taste.

To satisfy this instinct an enormous amount of cheap and showy knick-knacks were unloaded on the market, and every device of advertising was employed to convince purchasers that they were getting the very latest thing in household decoration—which, in a sense, they were. The popularization of photography provided all and sundry with a means of obtruding their existence hardly less distressing, in its effects, than that of initial-carving on ancient monuments. Frames of every kind were turned out to enshrine these attempts to look pleasant. Some were of silver, more of electro-plating, some of plush, some gilt, some painted, and they were all hung up, or stood up, screaming at each other like parrots in the Zoo. Then, as befitted an up-to-date age, there was a tremendous craze for novelties. A novelty was a device for effecting some very simple purpose, like that of striking a match or sharpening a pencil, in a highly elaborate and ornamental way. It was essential to a novelty that it should masquerade as something quite different from what it really was. Thus if you wanted to strike a match, you had a large pig framed in relief, and under him the legend "Please scratch my back." You then started rubbing your vestas against the pig, and with good luck you might get the fourth or fifth to ignite. To do our fathers justice, they did not buy novelties for their own use. The time for distributing them was at weddings, birthdays, and above all, at Christmas. They looked as if they had cost more than they had; they were usually sure of the applause that follows the latest conjuring trick; and they would soon be merged in an accumulation of similar objects without their uselessness being noted. For though nobody bought novelties for himself,

nobody ever thought of throwing them away so long as there was a cubic foot of space left for their reception. That would have been against all the instincts of the later Victorians. The more pretty things there were together the prettier the effect would be.

There has been such a complete clearance, or falling to pieces, of everything appertaining to the nineties, that it is difficult to convey any impression of an ordinary interior of that time, without being accused of wild exaggeration. I hope therefore, I may be excused for giving one or two concrete and typical instances of what was considered a smart and tasteful environment for ladies and gentlemen in that age of æsthetic endeavour.

My first specimen comprises one small corner of a *small drawing-room, round about 1890.* I have noted down the contents carefully from a photograph, and though my recollection of them is childish, most of the objects are things I remember quite sufficiently well. To start with the drapery, we have:

Huge velvet window curtains.

Heavy tapestry curtains of Persian design draping an arch.

Curtain of Eastern design, inlet with glass beads, draping a looking-glass.

Heavy drapery on the mantelpiece, also adorned with bits of glass.

Imitation Indian drapery looped over a Japanese screen.

Large armchair antimacassar with ball fringe.

Indian tablecloth on small knick-knack table.

Bit of Eastern drapery on the end of a couch.

A weird and nondescript bundle of drapery on a small table under two pots of ferns.

Another mass of drapery reflected in the looking-glass.

That is all the drapery—now we can get on with the other contents of the corner. These include:

Peacock-feather fan—almost inevitable at this time —hanging on the wall.

Two pots of ferns.

One india-rubber plant.

Every inch of the mantelpiece crowded with small pots, photos, bronze clock in glass case, fans, calendars, feathers, and articles whose use, if any, is unascertainable.

Two armchairs, two common cane chairs, and one round chair with a back, but no sides, apparently intended to seat a dwarf.

Four tables—one of plush, two covered with ornaments, and one, also covered with ornaments, for writing.

Behind the writing-table what can only be described as a large three-storied junk stand complete with brackets and mirrors, covered with vases of different shapes and sizes, and hung with plates and photos.

A Brussels carpet of very fidgety design makes up the picture, except that we just see the corner of a bracket which is presumably loaded with more ornaments.

I estimate the area in which all these things are contained to be about six feet by eight, but to the unbeliever I will concede a possible couple of feet each way.

Our next peep is into the drawing-room of a wealthy middle-aged bachelor, who had the reputation of possessing a particularly refined and fastidious taste—he was quite the recognized *arbiter elegantiarum* among his neighbours. Here we find rather less drapery, though what there is lacks nothing for magnificence. The mantelpiece is covered with red plush with a deep yellow galloon fringe; there are two plush tablecloths, one with Indian embroidery and the other with a long tasselled fringe, and two Eastern antimacassars artistically draped. The chairs are severely but no

doubt chastely uncomfortable, the one armchair, of plush, having a vertical back. There is a plush sofa, also straight-backed, and a lordly ottoman suggestive of the Manx arms, with a pillar-box erection in the middle covered with a fringed tablecloth. There are two tables, one with the inevitable plush top and one that might conceivably be a piece of really good old furniture. On one of these stands a portly brass pot, containing a plant of some kind, and surrounded by a dozen or so asters each in its own tumbledown vase. There is a large stand with fancy brackets flanked with shelves to support vases and plates, while in the angles of the fireplace are corner brackets, and the mantelpiece is crowded like Clacton Beach on a Bank Holiday. The overmantel is of Adam design, flanked by four miniatures in plush and two small portraits, and topped by five vases. There is, of course, a Japanese screen. The ceiling is elaborately decorated and such wallpaper as remains uncovered displays an embossed flower pattern. There is a large picture of a bursting wave, and a sort of crazy-pavement effect of other pictures, of all shapes and sizes, with bunches of candles sprouting everywhere there is a vacancy. Finally there is a large, comic cardboard cat—perhaps a Christmas present from some expectant nephew—enthroned on a receptacle of unknown purpose but sanitary suggestion.

I now come to a room that has happily survived, in something of its former glory, to our own day, and forms, I verily believe, a unique specimen of the period. It was built on to a much older country house early in the nineties, and has been left practically unchanged, except for such of its contents as have been unable to escape the ravages of time and domestic service. These probably included a fair amount of Japanese and bamboo ware, besides governess-made specimens, that I well remember, of the then popular patchwork covering. I hope I shall not be considered

guilty of queering the pitch if I have brought back, from adjacent rooms, one or two objects that obviously belong to this one.

The difficulty about this room is to discover what is imitating what. We enter by doors unplausibly painted to imitate walnut, and framed in what is probably deal of the same unholy intention. The wallpaper is of imitation needlework in dingy reds and blues on a beige background. Beneath this is a dado—one of the artiest fashions of the nineties—of expensive stamped paper, whose original gold and silver have faded to a mottled brown dinginess. The chimney-piece and overmantel strike one at first as being of elaborately carved walnut, but on being tapped they give a tell-tale metallic ring. Brown and mustard tiles in the fireplace carry on the colour scheme. The carpet is an imitation Persian, of a predominant claret colour; so is one of the armchairs, the other being of livid green and yellow imitation tapestry. There are two standard candlesticks, painted to resemble marqueterie inlay. There is a drain-pipe, standing bolt upright, painted pale blue, and adorned with children's "scraps" of floral designs. One of the few genuine objects in the room is a stuffed dog in an advanced stage of decomposition. There is also a stuffed puffin, beak by jowl with a terra-cotta bust of Lord Beaconsfield.

The crowning glory of the room is its collection of minor ornaments, still jostling one another in all the multitudinous irrelevance of their hey-day. The display of photographs is poor, no more than twenty-two,[1] but this deficiency is more than compensated for by the profusion of what I suppose were once novelties. Let us go to one small, corner table, and catalogue a few of its exhibits:

Horse-hoof pin-cushion.

[1] I think there must have been, at some time, a drastic weed out, since in the next room there are fifty odd.

Ash-tray with pedestalled, electro-plated golfer in Norfolk jacket.

Nickel dachshund pin-cushion.

Silver and cedarwood solid golfing shoe pin-cushion.

Horse-hoof inkstand with silver-plated inscription.

Silver golf-clubs and ball, forming paper-weight.

Silver-plated fox pin-cushion.

Silver ornamented pepper-pot, too small for pepper.

I will not trouble the reader with the whole of my catalogue of 57 articles, though I hope that its value, in full, as an historical document, may be appreciated some day, but I will select one or two specimen entries:

Horn yard-measure, minus tape.

Cheap brass envelope rack.

Dog's paw paper-knife.

Small horn cup, silver rim, purpose doubtful.

Electro-plated pen-wiper.

Advertisement bone paper-knife.

Hassock of magenta and green wool-work with beige background and green art serge.

Small scarlet wooden imitation milking-bucket, with gilded plaster flowers, tin handle, and pale green satin lining, possibly intended for a work basket.

Bellows adorned with water-colour seascape.

A perpetual calendar, operated by knobs that have remained unturned throughout the present century.

Hanging china receptacle, imitating bird's nest, purpose defies conjecture.

There is a lot more, but this ought to be enough, and more than enough, to show what the average taste of this brilliant epoch really amounted to.

No doubt there were exceptions, though these must have been sufficiently rare, to judge from the sort of room in which even Aubrey Beardsley was apparently content to die, and of which a photograph is extant in the Bodley Head edition of *Under the Hill.* Here we

have violently patterned carpet and wallpaper, plush-covered and fringed upholstery—almost certainly brown—flimsy-looking table and bamboo bookcase, a room in which no modern man of taste could endure to live. But there were signs of improvement in the fact that even in commerce such a firm as Liberty's had begun to point the way towards better things. And in architecture, the masters of the coming century, Lutyens and Baker, had already begun to find their feet by the end of the old.

CHAPTER VI

CULTURE IN CANARY

It was on a night in the autumn of 1892, when the moon was bathing the Sussex landscape and flooding through the window into his room, that Lord Tennyson, "a figure of breathing marble", lay dying.[1] He had spoken his last words, a solemn benediction, and before his failing eyes lay a Shakespeare which he himself had opened at the passage:

> Hang there, like fruit, my soul,
> Till the tree die.

It was the most magnificently staged death since that of Charles I, and it was the passing not only of a man but of an epoch. Now that the last of the giants who had flourished in the early years of the reign, except Watts and the mentally-dead Ruskin, had gone to his long home, the Victorian tradition in art and literature had ceased to bind. Everyone was conscious of living in a new age. Never had there been a more eager army of explorers after undiscovered countries of the soul.

Space does not avail so much as to catalogue the names of all the men and women of creative genius who were engaged in what Nietzsche would have called the breaking of the old tables. Most of these were young, and an extraordinary proportion died young. They squandered their vital energy with reckless prodigality. Some sought the stimulus of drink, others found that of the tuberculosis germ. As the Celtic saying was, "they always went forth to

[1] *Tennyson: A Memoir*, by Hallam, Lord Tennyson, pp. 774-5.

battle, and they always died"—or if not always, at least far too often.

Now that the times, and the spirit of the times, have changed so radically, it is difficult to realize how rich were those "Naughty Nineties" in every sort of creative promise. To contemporaries, it seemed like the beginning of a modern Renaissance, a time of higher values and more exacting standards. Why should not the arts share in the progress that was making all things new? In no other age had there been such wealth of criticism. Every individual "maker"—to use an old Scots word whose revival is sorely needed—had the opportunity of seeing his work in historical perspective; all the experience of the past was at his disposal, its treasures were being carefully collected and preserved, while the improvement of transport and of the arts of reproduction made them readily accessible. There was a pooling of international knowledge. The art journals were as eager as those of fashion to get the latest from Paris. The greatest foreign conductors were in eager demand for concerts. The raw crudities of the earlier Victorians were no longer tolerable in circles professedly cultured. The spectacle of Ruskin swiping Canaletto, or even of Matthew Arnold waving aside Shelley, would have raised contemptuous eyebrows among the *cognoscenti* of the Bodley Head or of the New English Art Club. That sort of thing was not said nowadays.

The modern critic was, in fact, extremely careful to make himself acquainted with what could or could not be said. To blaspheme any dead or living writer who had once been admitted to the sacred circle of the starred, in the great unwritten Baedeker's guide to the Realms of Gold, was to become an outsider to whom gold of a more material kind, would cease to come. It was the age of the Man of Letters, or critical Panjandrum. Precisely how the Little Round Button

was first acquired was not always easy to determine, for the Panjandrum had seldom written any work calculated to outlast a publishing season. But once he was established, he was unassailable. He had only to go on saying the right things about the right people to the end of an honoured and assured career. He would convince his public—and nobody would doubt him—of the wit of Congreve, the humanity of Sterne, the rareness of Ben Jonson. The invention of centenaries would soon give all the Panjandrums [1] the opportunity of discovering the same merits at the same moment in the same resurrected celebrity. Moreover, the Panjandrum was a power in the land—a budding author's reputation could be made by a favourable notice or frozen by neglect. For the Panjandrum seldom attacked; he was professionally urbane, and—to do him justice—usually good-natured. Some day his correspondence would be published and his genius for friendship—for the Panjandrum was invariably in with all the right people—revealed to the world.

To attack a Panjandrum was foolhardy; to expose him impossible. The last considerable attempt was made by Churton Collins, a critic who might himself have attained Panjandrumhood, but for his pedantic insistence out of season on exact knowledge. Among other essays in literary vivisection he submitted certain Histories of English Literature by contemporary writers to analysis, and showed them to be honeycombed with inaccuracies of the crudest description, not to speak of critical and stylistic howlers. The inconvenient fellow did himself no good and his victims no harm. One of them pointed out indignantly, by way of reply, that Collins had once been his guest. And Tennyson, who had become something

[1] Or possibly "Panjandra", though I hardly think the apparent asexuality of the species quite justifies the preciosity of the Latin neuter.

of a Panjandrum himself in his old age, and had all the true Victorian's dislike of those who trouble still waters, growled out that Collins was a louse on the locks of literature. In spite of some temporary flutters, the books and their authors have continued to be standard:

The louse it was that died.

If the critical irresponsibility of the elder Victorians had been superseded, so also had the individuality that lay at the back of it. When Ruskin or Macaulay thought a thing was wrong, they said so quite plainly and damned the consequences. What they said was sometimes regrettable and occasionally perverse, but you felt, when you read it, that you were getting a genuine article for your money. With the new critic you knew that if he harboured any unproportioned thought, he would be too well trained to give it tongue, a change that Matthew Arnold would no doubt have hailed with delight as signifying the triumph of the academic spirit over insular provincialism.

And no doubt, within the limits thus set, an immense amount of useful work was done. Literature and art were written up and explored as never before; budding talent could select its models from all times and styles, and had all the latest theories at its disposal. Small wonder if there was confidence in the capacity of the age to produce work of a higher order of merit, or at least of a more nearly impeccable standard of taste, than any of the past! The danger was not yet realized of genius being so crushed beneath the weight of the past and confined by the tyranny of the present—even the latest—fashion, as to be incapable of spreading her wings for the empyrean.

There was another danger in the intensive study of form and style, lest art should become like a beautiful piece of mechanism without driving power. It was

no longer a question of the artist or poet having something he burned to express in perfect form, but rather of his having previously perfected the form without knowing, or caring overmuch, what spirit that form was meant to embody. The elder Victorians had built their faiths upon all too shallow foundations that they had prudently taken for granted, but now that these had collapsed, there was little indeed to support faith for those who were unable to partake of Mr. Kipling's Blood and Law. It is not without significance that several of the most advanced spirits of the new movement should have sought peace by submission to the dogma and authority of Rome. Better be thought for than think in vain!

On one thing the apostles of the new culture were in agreement; they looked upon the world around them and found it the reverse of good. So far from attempting to give outward and beautiful form to the spirit of their age or to face its problems in any way, they deliberately isolated themselves in a world of their own. It was a favourite pose of theirs, and often a heartfelt conviction, that nothing in this world was worth taking seriously. This had been the theme of the last and most brilliant of all Wilde's creations before his fall, *The Importance of being Earnest*, as it was, in fact, of all his conversation. One might not comprehend life, still less aspire to mend it, but one could always turn it to ridicule, in the spirit of a contemporary song:

> What care I? Let the world go by,
> For it's better far to laugh than cry.

Or of John Davidson's lines:

> Though our century totters graveward
> We may laugh a little yet.

Mr. Osbert Burdett, who has written a sympathetic study of this phase, records two typical sayings of

Lionel Johnson, a young man of infinite promise tragically unfulfilled. He justified his advocacy of Home Rule for Ireland on the ground that it would be the most picturesque thing that could have happened. And when he was received into the Church of Rome, he told some one that he had taken this most momentous step in a man's life "wholly for purposes of controversy"[1]. One wonders what an earlier age, even that of the Prince Consort, would have made of this Johnson. A scholar who had carried off prize after prize at Winchester, whose mind was stored as richly as that of Burton or Milton, a poet, moreover, of exquisite sureness and delicacy, he would have seemed to have the world at his feet. But everything, somehow, ran to waste. He produced a few poems, perfectly chiselled, but chilled by a certain austere aloofness that never quite permits of their speaking to the heart. Add to these a slim book on Thomas Hardy and a few essays posthumously published, little gems of workmanship, but now almost forgotten, and you have the sum of his achievement. To a passion for turning night into day he added one for absinthe,[2] and soon became an invalid. After seven hopeless years, having only just arrived at the *mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*, he fell down in Fleet Street, fractured his skull, and so died.

In breaking from the shackles of Victorianism the rising generation had rid itself of its inhibitions. Having cut loose from the old moral moorings, and having neither rudder nor chart, its frail craft were swept along the first current they encountered to eventual shipwreck. If the elder Victorians had sentimentalized about chastity, their successors did so with a more nauseating fulsomeness about such sordid

[1] *The Beardsley Period*, p. 180.

[2] A muddy green decoction, tasting like the liquorice powder of the nursery, and sipped in cafés by the pious equisitae in remembrance of Verlaine.

things as alcoholic poisoning and promiscuous sexuality. "The Harlot's House" was a title that acted, like "Home, Sweet Home", as an agreeable stimulus. The cult of splendid sins was as old as Baudelaire, the only objection being that sins are more apt to be sordid than splendid. To sin really splendidly—as Mr. Kipling's Devil made clear to Tomlinson—force of character is needed. And force of character is not to be acquired without the faculty of inhibition.

Lack of inhibition was the real besetting sin of the Naughty Nineties, just as concentration had been the saving virtue of those earlier Victorians who believed in the importance of being earnest. There can seldom have been a time when genius ran so tragically to waste as during the *fin de siècle*. One thinks of Ernest Dowson, writing exquisite lyrics to the proprietor's daughter of some poky restaurant, who, having her doubts about a swain who was in the habit of getting mad drunk and using horrible language, very sensibly married the waiter. One thinks of John Davidson, who started as a poet, developed into the prophet of a frightfully long-winded Satanism—the sort of thing that goes down in Bolshevik No-God societies—and finally threw himself off a cliff. One thinks of Wilde himself blaspheming the spirit that was in him by condescending to the level of a dirty schoolboy, and emerging from jail so incurable a waster that he was unable to sit down and write the play, *Ahab and Jezebel*, by which he had planned to win back his fallen laurels. And one thinks of the honest old Elizabethan proverb—"the Devil is an ass".

It was in 1894 that the new spirit attained its maximum of prestige with the appearance of a new quarterly, *The Yellow Book*. This venture was due to the enterprise of one of the most remarkable characters who have ever figured in the publishing

world—John Lane. He was a man of double personality, one of the hardest drivers of a bargain that ever printed contract, but also a passionate art-lover with a *flair* for producing beautiful books and attracting the pink of young authors. *The Yellow Book* did not set out to be the organ of any group, but it succeeded, during the first year of its existence, in attracting so many authors and artists of the new movement that its colour will always be symbolic of the nineties at their most ninetyish. Its original art editor and the designer of its first four covers was Aubrey Beardsley, who, before consumption cut short his all too brief career, established a fair claim to rank as the greatest of all English masters of the pure line. With him the cult of evil, for its own sake, culminated. He could draw like a fallen angel, or more precisely, like a Pre-Raphaelite turned decadent. He delighted to impart to the human face an expression of hard or leering or agonized sensuality such as one does not look to find this side of Styx. And yet this fascination of the artist by evil—may it not have been one of horror? In some pictures, *Lady Gold*, for instance, and *The Wagnerites*, the satire on the vices of the age is direct and merciless. There is a profound moral resemblance between the art of Beardsley and the prose of Mr. Aldous Huxley.

After *The Yellow Book* had been running for four numbers, occurred, in the spring of 1895, the scandal of the Oscar Wilde trial. Wilde, as it happened, had never had anything to do with *The Yellow Book*, but the effect on the so-called "decadent" tendency that it was supposed to embody was to bring it, and its promoters, under dire suspicion. It was known that the fear of further proceedings had caused quite a little exodus to France of well-known people. England was caught by a not unprecedented rampancy of virtue. Those who chuckled in bars over the latest story about "old Oscar" were determined that they

would have no more tampering with morals in the name of the muses. The new broom was applied even to the chaste floor of the Bodley Head. Among the contributors to *The Yellow Book* was Mr. William Watson,[1] an accomplished poet of the old Victorian tradition, who could turn out verses that at their best might have been mistaken for Tennyson's. This gentleman felt that the time had come for him to do his bit on the side of the angels. One of the angels was good Mrs. Humphry Ward. With her moral support, Mr. Watson put down his foot. Beardsley, who, as usual, had designed the cover—a design in which the most ingenious modern critic would be puzzled to spot the offensive element—must go. Otherwise Mr. Watson's poem would be withdrawn,[2] a Hymn to the Sea, concluding, as a hymn ought to do, with an uplifting line,

Man and his greatness survive, lost in the greatness of God:

Here was a problem for the editor, Henry Harland, to whom the ultimatum was addressed, not to speak of poor Lane. Not that Lane loved art less, but that he loved Lane more, for as he once candidly remarked to the present author, "I am a man of business and not a man of sentiment." Moreover, he had been infuriated by the discovery that one of his office boys had been mixed up with the Wilde affair. *The Yellow Book* must be above suspicion, the cover must be scrapped, the art editor go. It would never do at such a juncture to lose the moral prestige conferred by Mr. Watson's hymn.

From this time forth *The Yellow Book* ceased to be of any special significance. It went on existing for another couple of years, and the support of such unexceptionable contributors as Gosse, Garnett, A. C. Benson, Walter Raleigh, and Mr. Watson himself,

[1] Now Sir William.

[2] *The Beardsley Period*, by Osbert Burdett, p. 253.

overseas for its inspiration. The methods of the French impressionists were eagerly studied, and copied with perhaps too little attempt to adapt them to the requirements of the national genius. Mr. Sickert was in the van of this movement, and also Mr. Wilson Steer, before he adopted a style more redolent of the fields of Constable than the studios of the Quartier Latin. Mr. Clausen showed how the latest devices of coloration could be used to glorify the sweetest of old-world country-sides.

In sculpture excellent work was being accomplished. Gilbert had showed, by his Eros fountain in Piccadilly Circus, that plastic grace could thrive unrebuked even in London, and the tomb he designed for the Duke of Clarence, at Windsor, ranks high in the annals of monumental art. In Wells Cathedral it is not too much to say of Brock's recumbent effigy of Lord Arthur Hervey that it is no unworthy newcomer to a glorious company.

Even in music, the long silence, or worse, that had reigned in the land of Byrd and Purcell, was at last beginning to be broken. Very wisely, England was going to school again, and reviving an intelligent appreciation of music by attracting the master conductors and executants of the Continent to her shores. She was producing composers of her own, if not yet in the very first rank, at least the precursors of revival. The thoroughly national genius of Sullivan was reinforced by that of Edward German, whose incidental music to *Henry VIII* was first performed at the Lyceum in 1892. In a more serious vein, there were Stanford and Parry. And in 1900 an event occurred of epoch-making importance. Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* gave proof, to all who had ears to hear, that great music was no longer the monopoly of Continental composers.

In literature there was the same tale to tell of restless activity, of new ways explored, of ancient idols de-

throned. It was perhaps significant of what was to come in another sphere than that of art, that England should have turned with such eager admiration to "that sweet enemy, France". As the methods of the French impressionists had been copied by the painters, so were those of the French realists, particularly Zola, by the writers, though English virtue could not be content without jailing a publisher who was indiscreet enough to bring out a translation, not sufficiently mutilated, of that master's *La Terre*. Mr. George Moore, a thorough Parisian, showed, in his *Esther Waters*, how the record of commonplace lives could be both scientifically exact and artistically satisfying. The realistic method is much to the fore in the early *Yellow Books*, and the names of Ella d'Arcy, George Egerton and Hubert Crackenthorpe occur in this connection.

There is the opposite method of deliberately extravagant phantasy, of which *Under the Hill* is an example, and of which Mr. Max Beerbohm made himself a master in two arts. Nor must we forget the Celtic Revival associated, in the English mind, with the name of Mr. W. B. Yeats, whose genius had somewhat closer affinities with modern British than ancient Irish literature. He provided a healthy corrective for the French influence by substituting for its clear-cut Latinity the misty outlines of the Irish landscape. But to record all the shades and nuances of literary aspiration in this most prolific of decades would require a volume of no common bulk to itself.

The image that rises most readily in the mind's eye is that of children, running after the rainbow. There is a bag of gold, they know, where it touches ground. One or other of them will sooner or later secure the prize and yet . . .

And one thinks of those old Victorian giants, enthroned complacently on their hoards, and wonders how they ever came by such wealth.

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW DRAMA

There is one branch, at least, of English art in the *fin de siècle*, to which the term Renaissance can, in its fullest sense, be applied. This is the art of the theatre. It is true that never, since the days of Garrick, had the English stage lacked some actor or actress of outstanding personality, but in mid-Victorian times such a thing as a native drama had practically ceased to exist, except on the paper on which Browning recorded his explorations into the dim recesses of the soul. There was that romantic exquisite Lord Lytton, who among some now almost incredible rant, at least gave, in *Money*, proof of the true dramatist latent in him. But with the exception of Shakespeare, who, like some primitive god, went through the ritual of being murdered every year, the sort of stuff put on the boards in the mid-century might fairly be described, in theatrical slang, as tripe.

The first promise of better things to come was given, in the sixties, by Robertson's *Society* and *Caste*, in which some attempt was at long last made to depict life as it really was. But Robertson's plots are clumsily patched together, and though his plays might even now stand revival for the sake of their quaintness, it would be hardly possible for a modern audience to take them seriously. Robertson died young, and his lead was slow in being followed up.

During the seventies and eighties the main interest of English drama is centred in an actor, Henry Irving, or rather, after 1878, in the Lyceum combination of Irving and Ellen Terry. Irving, though he only rose

into prominence when the great Victorian Age was already on the wane, was the perfect type of the great Victorian. He took himself and his art with an awful and unquestioning seriousness, and his histrionic genius enabled him to impress that seriousness on his audiences. His very mannerisms contributed to the effect. By altering his vowel intonations—" death ", for example, to something like " dath "—he succeeded in heightening the tension he aimed at creating. The effect of his presence resembled that of Gladstone on his audience. Their critical faculty was stunned. Irving would have been fully capable of declaiming *Pop goes the weasel* in a hushed silence. Shakespeare to him was emphatically the Bard, and to say that his rendering of Hamlet or Macbeth had the impressiveness of a religious function would be far short of the truth. It must be added that his interpretations of the parts could be nobly original—Shylock, for instance, he rescued from the contempt into which he had fallen as an anti-Semitic cockshy and invested him with a tragic dignity worthy of his creator.

But Irving was not the man to encourage a revival of dramatic composition. Apart from Shakespeare, he had no real desire for drama in which the chief honours would go not to the actor but to the author. Supreme master as he was of his craft, he wanted parts that he could stamp entirely with the impress of his own personality, parts that he alone could raise out of the commonplace and crown with an immortality all his own. The part with which his name will always be identified is that of Mathias in *The Bells*, a production of no special merit except such as Irving was able to impart to it. *The Bells* without Irving would be as great a fiasco as *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark, for the reason that *The Bells*, to all intents and purposes, *was* Irving. We wonder how many of those who have been thrilled by the play could remember the name of the dramatist.

Here, too, the analogy with Gladstone and other great Victorians might be claimed, by the Devil's advocate, to hold good. It used to be said of those who had been carried away by the Grand Old Man's eloquence, that after the spell had been lifted and the critical faculty had had a chance to reassert itself, they had frequently asked themselves, in vain, what precisely it was that they had received with such gladness and whether they had not been part of the chorus in that perennial tragi-comedy called "Great is Diana of the Ephesians". Could it be suggested that Irving too might be a rhetorician, inebriated, and inebriating, by the exuberance of his own verbosity? There was a Devil's advocate, or disciple, who suggested it quite unmistakably in his correspondence with Irving's leading lady. His name was George Bernard Shaw.

During the eighties there were few signs that English drama was on the eve of a revival. If there had been no other obstacle in the way, one almost insuperable had been established in the censorial veto of the Lord Chamberlain, or rather of any underling whom that official might choose to employ. To this person every play had to be submitted by the producer—the author's existence was not regarded—and it depended on his arbitrary caprice, against which there was neither argument nor appeal, whether the play could be legally performed. Insult was piled upon injury by providing that the Censor's fees should come out of the pockets of his victims. That so grotesque a tyranny could have been established in the heart of a free country shows the utter indifference of a public that professed to idolize Shakespeare to the art of which he had been a master. For every play the Censor killed—and he did not draw the line at Sophocles, Shelley, and Maeterlinck—a score must have died unwritten, since few authors dared risk having months of patient labour rendered nugatory, and where there was no law but caprice, such risks

were very great, except in deliberately salacious comedy, where suggestion, on lines tolerated by the Censor and thoroughly understood by the audience, was a safe and piquant substitute for candid indecency.

In 1889 an event took place whose importance as a step towards the emancipation of women we have already tried to indicate. It was even more important as heralding the Renaissance of the English drama. This was the performance of Ibsen's *Doll's House* at The Novelty Theatre. Whatever we may think of this play as propaganda—and as propaganda it was treated by both friends and enemies—there is no doubt that as a work of dramatic art it stood on an incomparably higher level than any new work produced on the British stage since the days of Sheridan. That is not to say that it contained within itself the elements of a great popular success. The Ibsen drama is not a plant that thrives luxuriantly in the London atmosphere. There is something in its sombre intensity that will never quite harmonize with John Bull's more easy-going temperament—something too that is apt to tickle his sense of humour in a way unintended by the author. The joyous noblemen for whose coming that atrabilious young dog, Rosmer, professes to look, the sporting grandfather who solaces himself with hunting expeditions in the garret, the incredible kittenishness of the relations between a seven-years-married banker and his spendthrift wife, may be defensible, in the abstract, but imagine Mr. Shaw dropping bricks of this clay!

There was soon a cult of Ibsen among advanced people, and in 1893 no less than six of his plays were produced in London, but it was never a cult that struck deep roots. It was as a stimulus of the English drama that Ibsen's influence was most powerful. That was largely due to the fact that in William Archer the Master found not only a translator, but an evangelist. Archer was a Scot, who, without any special

creative ability of his own, had a positive genius for discipleship. He was desperately convinced of the importance of being earnest on the subject of Ibsen, and his enthusiasm was infectious. For though to the public Ibsen might never be more than a nine days' wonder, to dramatists, who were already beginning to look for a new dawn, he came as a wonder and an inspiration. Here was a dialogue that, instead of the tawdry rant and theatrical jargon that had done duty hitherto, was actually true to life ; here was a technique that put out of date the innumerable crudities and loose ends of accepted convention. There was something more—a high seriousness of purpose, an uncompromising search for truth, that might or might not lend themselves to imitation.

It was just how far this new spirit, as distinct from new method, could be imparted to English drama, that constituted the crucial problem of the new Renaissance. The fate of Bunyan's pilgrims, who came to Vanity Fair offering the truth, was not coveted by authors who were human enough to want a market for their wares. Some sort of compromise was called for. The public must not have more truth thrust down its throat than it was prepared to receive. Reality must be tempered to the demands of the box office.

Accordingly we have two distinct streams of dramatic tendency flowing from beneath the seat of Ibsen. There is first a transformation of the West End drama by the importation of just as much of the new spirit as can be reconciled with the conventional requirements of its patrons. There is, though slower in development, a genuine new drama, that aims at exposing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, to all who care to receive it.

With the first and popular revival the names of Henry Arthur Jones and Sir Arthur Pinero are most prominently associated. Oscar Wilde is another not-

able figure, but he owes little to Ibsen, and much to French models. The real new drama is the creation and—so far as the nineties are concerned—practically the monopoly of one man, Mr. Bernard Shaw.

That Mr. Shaw's work possesses an importance immeasurably transcending that of the very able men who were scoring popular successes during the nineties—and, incidentally, raising the prestige of the British drama to a height undreamed of earlier in the century—will hardly be denied now that his reputation has attained its zenith. But the decisive factor of his supremacy has never been quite satisfactorily explained even by Mr. Shaw himself, and that it should be realized is much to be desired in view of the slump that is due, sooner or later, to follow his present boom, as inevitably as night follows day. It is certainly not the realism of his character drawing—Henry Arthur Jones's characters talk and behave far more as men and women do in ordinary life than Mr. Shaw's brilliant debaters—or than his men of straw who are put up merely to be scored off. It is not constructional unity—Mr. Shaw is always ready to sacrifice plot to dialogue. It is not even wit—there Wilde is at least his peer.

Mr. Shaw came nearest to explaining the secret with his modest query, "Greater than Shakespeare?" "Greater" is putting it a little high, but "the same as Shakespeare" would at least hint at part of the truth. For while such brilliant rivals as Beaumont and Fletcher were pandering to their audiences by concentrating on that one side of life that is concerned with sex relations, Shakespeare was taking the whole of life for his province, and putting sex into its due place in the scheme of things. Of Shakespeare's four supreme tragedies, in only one, Othello, is the sex-interest predominant, and even the Moor—do not his last words proclaim it?—has his heart deepest of all in his profession of arms.

The dramatists who were dominating the stage, while Mr. Shaw was struggling obscurely and volubly towards recognition, might be described as being the Beaumonts and Fletchers of their time to his Shakespeare—at least in so far as the matter of their plays is concerned. They had their audiences to think of, and these audiences did not bargain for the naked truth as part of their evening's entertainment. They asked of the dramatist no more than to transport them, for three hours, into a convincing dream world, in which their emotions would be stimulated in the most agreeable way, and their reasoning faculty not unduly strained. The sex problems of the idle and blue-blooded rich were what they most delighted to see unravelled. Within the limits set them, their servants the dramatists gave them splendid value for their money. Not since Sheridan had plots been so deftly constructed or dialogue so brilliant. All that Ibsen had to teach, except the one thing most essential, was eagerly assimilated.

But this drama—for the sufficient reason that it aimed at nothing higher—could have no brilliancy that was not of the surface. The characters were pieces in a game with arbitrary rules. These characters inhabit a world where nearly everybody appears to have an unlimited bank balance and consequently unlimited leisure to tie his or her life into fancy knots. In Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* the whole trouble arises from the fact that a happily married young peer, having discovered that a certain lady with a past is really his mother-in-law, rather than communicate frankly to his wife the appalling information that she is not an orphan, not only pays blackmail, but embarks on a course of deception so compromising to himself that his wife, not unnaturally believing the worst, decamps to the house of the inevitable titled Don Juan. In Sir Arthur Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, a fastidious and conventional widower has

suddenly taken it into his head to make an honest woman of a harlot. His daughter by the first marriage, an immaculate prig, gets engaged to an officer who turns out to have had dealings with the stepmother in her professional capacity. The ex-harlot, instead of keeping her mouth shut about the whole business, feels it a moral duty to inform her husband, who in turn feels it a moral duty to break off the engagement, and so the daughter's life is wrecked and the second Mrs. Tanqueray commits suicide. Henry Arthur Jones's *The Liars*, usually considered to be his masterpiece of comedy, centres round a tremendous conspiracy to conceal from a boorishly morose husband the fact that his wife, a frivolous society woman, has nearly, but not quite, allowed a man acquaintance to stand her a dinner at a riverside hotel. What the poor man—who has threatened not to spare her—can do to avenge himself for this contemplated gluttony is not explained. Even in the nineties such goings-on would not have raised a single eyebrow in the set to which Lady Jessica is supposed to have belonged.

It is all excellent fun and a capital way of passing an evening. But there is no element of permanence in such work, not even the poetic beauty that is the enduring part of Beaumont and Fletcher. Mr. Shaw's conception of the drama was more ambitious and far more serious. His drama should be a searchlight, to illuminate the whole of life and flood its darkest and deepest recesses. He had no idea of giving the public what it wanted. He was out to shock its dearest prejudices, to defy its conventions, to challenge the whole system of society, and ultimately to make the public want, and pay for, what he chose to give it. At the time he commenced as a dramatist, he had already tried his fortune at the easier craft of novel-writing, and proved an almost unqualified failure at it. His own friend, William Archer, could not believe

him to be of the stuff of which successful dramatists are made. His was no doubt a compelling personality, with his Irishman's gift of the gab, his nimble pen, and his revolutionary philosophy. He added a much-needed element of sparkle to the statistical solemnity of his fellow Fabians. But that he could create a new model drama and force the world to accept it stood not within the prospect of belief.

Like Ibsen, he went straight to the heart of contemporary life. His first play was an ill-constructed, but extremely interesting, attempt to expose the capitalist foundations of wealth and poverty. He did not even stop short, in another, at dealing seriously, instead of salaciously, with the question of prostitution, though this proved to be more than the Censor could stomach. Yet another of the labours of this motley Hercules was to strip the last trappings of glory from the profession of arms. Sex itself was shorn of its romance, and women were shown forging their own careers and mistresses of their own fates. Whether they continued to be recognizable women was another matter.

By the end of the century, the new drama, with the fist of Mr. Shaw, was knocking loudly at the door for recognition. With his natural genius for advertisement, he had already contrived to get himself, and it, talked about among a widening circle of educated people. But he was still, to all intents and purposes, a dramatist on paper, for though some of his work had actually been produced, it was not yet the sort of stuff that managers had begun to take seriously as a commercial proposition. Very well then, if he could not get it performed, Mr. Shaw would get it published, and season it with prefaces and appendices. Moreover, as dramatic critic of the *Saturday Review*, he had contrived to be his own John the Baptist to the gospel he was presently to proclaim across the footlights.

Thus we leave Mr. Shaw at the close of the century, still the gay and solitary adventurer who had started years ago on his mad crusade. But now it was beginning to seem as if there were some method in his madness. The gates of the New Jerusalem were already in sight. The new drama was not yet born, but the interesting event was expected.

It will be time enough when we come, in a future volume, to judge of his later achievement, to cast up the debit side of the account. To rise from office boy to multi-millionaire involves some sacrifice of scruple, and whether it was possible to resurrect a dead drama without some corresponding sacrifice of intellectual and artistic integrity the event would show. Granted that Mr. Shaw had wedded drama to philosophy, might not that philosophy itself turn out to be built up on the quick intellectual returns of the soap-box and the pamphlet? It may be better to blow one's own trumpet incessantly in the market-place than to remain a voice crying in the wilderness, but it is in the silence of the wilderness that the still, small voice is heard.

CHAPTER VIII

THE APOTHEOSIS OF SPORT

No survey of the *fin de siècle* could be complete without some mention of that great outlet for superfluous energy provided by sport. The historical importance of sport need not be pointed out to anyone who has stood in the shadow of the Colosseum or read the Odes which Pindar composed to hymn the joy of a city over the triumph of some successful athlete. During the nineteenth century England had been pre-eminently the country of sport, and the idea that foreigners could compete with Englishmen in any sort of athletic pursuit would have been scouted as too absurd for words. Had not Wellington hunted the fox, as he had hunted the French, from Torres Vedras to Toulouse? The very spirit of sport was claimed as an English monopoly. No foreign language had any equivalent to "unsporting conduct", or "it's not cricket".

There are two aspects in which sport affects the individual. Either he himself is an athlete, and takes an active part in the proceedings, or else he is a spectator, and such energy as he expends finds vent in shouting, clapping, or some other form of emotional response. If it were possible to cast a balance between the two, we should probably find that the sum of enjoyment derived from sport by proxy has enormously outweighed, in urban and industrial communities, that derived from muscular participation. It was only when Rome became a vast metropolis with a completely urbanized populace, that circuses became as urgent a necessity as bread. The same

need was bound to arise, in an even more acute form, in the new towns that had sprung up as a result of the Industrial Revolution. After a week's more or less monotonous work tending machinery, the necessity for some more congenial outlet for energy becomes overwhelming. The crowded hour of glorious life on Saturday afternoon makes ordinary life, for the rest of the week, worth living. The conditions of the town are not those of the village, where everybody, more or less, is out in the open air, and has a green or meadow in easy reach where he can knock or kick about a ball with his pals, where, too, there are no opportunities for organizing the team spirit on a vast scale.

Early in the nineteenth century, it had become the special function of the aristocracy to organize and capitalize sport. The aristocrat had been a sportsman from time immemorial—William the Conqueror had "loved the tall stag as though he were their father". But it was a long time before the great man became, like the Roman Emperor, the provider of popular entertainment, and not merely of his own selfish, and often oppressive pleasure. Shooting has always remained more or less true to the old ideal of a rich man's exclusive amusement. To this day woodlands and moors are denied the ordinary man in order that their owners, at certain periods, may indulge in a carnival of slaughter, or hire out their domains to other and richer men for the purpose. The story of the depopulation of the Highlands by their own chiefs, first for pasturage but afterwards for sport, is one of the saddest in history.

Shooting, as the rich man's amusement *par excellence,* had been quite transformed, in the course of the Queen's reign, by the more luxurious standards of the new age. The old type of sportsman had trudged laboriously over the fields with his muzzle-loader, only too glad if at the end of the day he had bagged a

round dozen of birds. At the close of the century the sportsman would stand in a carefully chosen spot at the edge of the wood, or in a butt, with one man, or perhaps two, attending him with spare guns, while his quarry was driven over his head to be massacred. Bags now ran into three and even four figures. Of course these easy conditions could not be obtained in such forms of sport as partridge and woodcock shooting, or in deer stalking, where it was still necessary for the sportsman to find his quarry before shooting it. And there was something in the British temperament that revolted from the colossal massacres that were staged on the Continent, in which beasts were driven in droves and birds in flocks to be butchered under conditions that required from the sportsman little more than mechanical trigger-pulling. The German Emperor was notoriously fond of this sort of entertainment, but then nobody who had taken part in a shoot with the German Emperor was ever under the least illusion that he was a sportsman in the English sense. He was out to kill; he had a divine right to be enabled to do so on an imperial scale, and there was an end of it.

One very popular form of amusement, much patronized by the Prince of Wales, was the shutting up of pigeons in boxes, and then, by an ingenious contrivance, opening the lids, in order that men with guns might display their skill by slaughtering or wounding the birds as they tried to fly away. This is one of the few forms of modern sport that has shocked the public conscience enough to get it stopped by law, though it goes on as merrily as ever at Monte Carlo.

There is a different tale to tell of hunting, which, though no more humane to the quarry, was far more of a popular entertainment. The meet of the hounds was a public and popular function, especially when more people had horses to ride on than in these days of the motor. Even those who could not ride could

derive a good deal of pleasure from following the sport on foot. Moreover, as the century advanced, even masters of hounds felt themselves under a certain necessity of conciliating the farmers over whose land they rode, and whom they expected, at the expense of their own hen-roosts, to refrain from private war on "Mr. Reynolds". The farmer became the spoilt child of the hunt; he could get his sport for nothing, and also put in claims for compensation for any damage done by foxes.

Hunting at the end of the century was very different from what it had been in the days of "Nimrod" and old Jack Mytton. What would have most surprised these worthies, could they have returned to the scene of their old activities, would have been to see almost as many women as men out with the hounds, and these not of the adventuress type, but the wives and sisters of the men. They would have found the breed of hounds probably improved, faster and less heavily built, but they would, in all but the most favoured districts of the shires, have missed the long runs when a man, or a fox, could go anywhere or do anything. A new terror had arisen in the form of wire, and foxes—well aware of the proclivities of gamekeepers—were less willing to stray from their own districts.

But for all that, hunting remained firmly established as—pre-eminently—the popular sport of rural districts. It no doubt acted as a social factor of importance, in preserving the ascendancy of the landed gentry. And such arbitrary oppression as it involved affected too small a minority of recalcitrant poultry-keepers, cultivators, and humanitarians, to bring it into serious disrepute.

Another sport in which the rich functioned even more obviously as the entertainers of the people was that of racing. This had already been in full swing under the auspices of the Merry Monarch at New-

market, and good Queen Anne, who was an enthusiastic sportswoman, had added Ascot as her contribution. From that time the breed of English race-horses had gone on constantly improving, and racing had strengthened its hold on the popular affections. As far as the ordinary man was concerned, the sport was one in which he never dreamed of taking a direct part. His function was twofold, partly that of spectator, partly of gambler. Towards the end of the century, even that of spectator was often cut out, and innumerable poor people contrived to have their flutter without even so much as seeing the horse of their fancy.

It was a curious freak of language that the mere fact of capitalizing sport was sufficient to confer the reputation of sportsman. The rich owner might hire some one to superintend the buying or breeding of his stud, some one to train his horses, some one else to ride them—his whole initiative in the matter might be confined to the signing of cheques—and yet he, and not these others, would be acclaimed as the great sportsman and patron of the turf. So long as patronage of the turf remained in aristocratic hands, the absurdity was not so great as it might have appeared, since the lord whose colours were most frequently seen past the winning-post was likely to figure as conspicuously, in his own pink coat, in the forefront of a stiff run with the hounds. But when it came to sleek money-bugs and Rand-lords assuming the title of sportsman on the strength of their bank balances, the case was different.

The fact remains that there was no surer title to popularity than that conferred by the capitalization of sport. The successful grocer, Thomas Lipton, achieved the reputation not only of a sportsman, but a defender of his country's honour, by entering the first of a series of yachts in a constantly repeated attempt to win the America Cup. Lord Rosebery

derived as much kudos from the fact of his owning the Derby-winner, Ladas, as from that of his being Prime Minister, though this was not wholly to his advantage, for no small part of the Liberal Party strength was derived from the support of Nonconformists, many of whom looked upon the race-course as the peculiar domain of his Satanic Majesty. The ever-increasing popularity enjoyed by the Prince of Wales arose largely from his reputation of being also the Prince of sportsmen. He was certainly an excellent shot, though not of the extraordinary merit of his son, and even figured once at Lord's, though—cricket being no respecter of persons—his bag on this occasion was a duck. But he had neither the build nor the temperament that fits a man for violent exercise. It was as a patron of sport that his laurels were won. And people regarded his zest for amusement as a sort of royal sanction for their own.

Thus the aristocracy, though they had forfeited the position they had occupied in the eighteenth century as leaders in the realms of statesmanship and culture, did fulfil a certain function as organizers of entertainment. Whether it was good for the nation to have its natural leaders specialized in this way may be open to question.

In any case, they could no longer maintain their old practical monopoly of leadership. The field of their activities had been in the open country from which their wealth was derived, but the new, industrial masses needed to have spectacles provided for them to which they could have convenient access. They were unable to get out constantly into the open, and no local race-course could function often enough to serve their needs. Their obvious resource was provided by ball games, that could be played in enclosed spaces in the very heart of the towns. In England this meant cricket in the summer and football in the winter.

Of these two, cricket was much slower to adapt itself to the changed conditions. It had a tradition and ceremonial that were already deeply rooted in the English past, and it is a curious fact that, in the British Isles, its popularity seems confined to districts predominantly English—it has never taken deep root in the Celtic Fringe. It was also, during the nineteenth century, the one game in which the amateur could look the professional fairly in the face, and, in fact—since he was more inclined to take risks—the amateur was apt to be considerably the more popular of the two with the spectators. The continuity of cricket is greatly strengthened by the fact that no other game so far admits of historical record. In football or rowing, the individual is merged in the side; the hero is easily forgotten, and all that time preserves of a contest is the bare result. With cricket, the doings of every individual admit of exact record, and with the aid of the score, and an adequate commentary, the historic matches of the past can be followed, and their thrills experienced, when the contending heroes have become as legendary as those of Greece and Troy.

The last thirty years of the century might be described as the golden age of cricket. They were dominated by one great personality, that of W. G. Grace, indisputably and, for all time, the Champion. W. G. was the greatest in size and not the least in impressiveness of all the great typical Victorian personalities. If Tennyson had attained the cricketing eminence of the present holder of his title, he would, one feels, have faced the bowler with the same majestic assurance, and his beard would have wagged as formidably as that of "the old man". His style would have been of the same direct and downright mastery, English to the core, with no touch of Oriental subtlety, or machine-like colonial efficiency.

The period was one peculiarly rich in historic con-

tests, because neither wickets nor batting methods were standardized to the extent they have since become, and there was no question of prolonging matches for anything up to a week to ensure a decision. The opening year of our period, 1870, witnessed the immortal Oxford and Cambridge Match, in which Yardley scored the first inter-'varsity hundred, and Cobden, when Oxford only wanted three runs to win, got all the three remaining wickets with successive balls, producing a scene of excitement unique in the annals of Lord's. In 1878 arrived the Australians, raw-boned bearded giants, who seemed as if they had stepped straight out of the Bush, and who amazed everybody by defeating, in the space of one day, a strong M.C.C. side headed by W. G. himself.

For the next twelve years, the visit became biennial, and in 1880 the first All-England team took the field on British soil. It is significant that England was captained not by W. G., but, as of right, by the one peer on the side, Lord Harris. The game ended in a victory for England, though not without a tremendous fight. Two years later, however, the tables were turned at the Oval, when, on a rather dismal September day, the English team, who seemed to have had the match absolutely in their hands, proved utterly incapable of standing up to that great bowling genius, Spofforth, and were beaten after a desperately contested fight by a bare seven runs.

To the end of the century cricket managed to retain its soul and prestige, and to maintain the healthy balance between amateur and professional talent. While W. G. was enjoying a wonderful St. Martin's summer celebrating the half-century of his life by scoring a thousand runs in the month of May, a new artist of the willow burst into fame—the Indian Prince, Ranjitsinhji, who imparted a touch to batting as distinctively Oriental as that of Grace was English. At the end of the Queen's reign, cricket could claim

the distinction of being the one game in which, whether on the village green or the turf of Lord's, all classes habitually played together in a spirit of comradeship and on a footing of equality.

It was not so with football. That, during the seventies, had aimed at being, unlike cricket, a completely amateur game. The Football Association Cup was then competed for by such teams as those of the Universities and the famous Royal Engineers' side, and it was only when, in the early eighties, the Northern Clubs began to make a serious bid for supremacy, that professionalism was first insinuated and, in 1885, definitely legalized. The Amateur Clubs dropped out of the competition, and the stronghold of Amateur Football now became the Rugby Union, which, in spite of a professional secession in the North, maintained the Rugby Game as an amateur preserve.

Meanwhile the Association Game, now organized under the auspices of the Football League, became entirely professional and spectacular. The object was to hire teams of expert players who should provide the industrial workers, on their half-holidays, with the maximum of excitement that could be crowded into a brief space of time. The imagination of the spectators was relied upon, not in vain, to sustain the illusion that the teams that wore the club colours consisted of picked representatives of the locality. As a matter of fact, football professionals came to be bought up as easily as slaves in the old-time markets, and the measure of a club's talent was usually the depth of its purse. A Cup-tie match was a gladiatorial contest brought up to date, with the killing part cut out.

Of its popularity there was no doubt. In 1897, as many as 65,000 spectators attended the Crystal Palace for the final Cup-tie, and this was small compared with the figures of the coming century. The emotional

safety-valve thus provided no doubt made for social stability. The man who lashes himself into a fever of excitement about the Arsenal or the Villa is less likely to boil over with indignation about the iniquities of the capitalist system.

The demands of the middle class, of both sexes, for some open-air relaxation from the monotony of their daily lives, were met by the importation of the ancient Scottish—and originally Dutch—game of golf. It was about the middle of the eighties that the Golf Stream, as Mr. Punch called it, began to flow Southwards, and soon golf links began to spring up all over the English countryside. There was a dour Calvinist austerity and silent concentration about the game that had been foreign, hitherto, to the spirit of English sport, but there could have been no better way of getting the tired office worker out into the open air, and making him forget the worries of business in the more acute discontents arising from uncarried bunkers and foozled drives. It was also a game in which the elderly could take part without discredit—had not there been old Tom Morris to set the example?

Lawn tennis started by being a genteel and party amusement, an agreeable romp, in which both sexes could take part. It was only gradually that a more serious side emerged, a scientific technique was evolved, and championships began to be contested. Up to the end of the century it retained its class exclusiveness, and, as its name implied, was played mostly on private lawns by the intimates of those fortunate enough to possess them, and such clubs as did exist were confined to one social set.

Hunting had already been conquered by Woman; lawn tennis had been hers from the first, and at golf she soon began to claim equal rights with Man, though on most links there were ladies' tees, to shorten the length of the hole for the weaker sex. How far feminine athleticism had progressed by the beginning

of the nineties may be judged from a note of J. Ashby Sterry in the *Graphic* of the 18th of July, 1891.

"Complaint was formerly made", he says, "that ladies did not take enough exercise. Now it is argued that they take a great deal too much. They have gone from one extreme to another and athletics have been very much overdone. Whether it is in gymnastics, or lawn tennis, or swimming, or golf, they are too enthusiastic and have no idea of moderation."

But the demand for exercise, in which both sexes could take part, continued to expand. For one winter,[1] there was a perfect craze for paper-chases, a form of sport in which the "hounds" showed a marked tendency to struggle in couples, while a small band of earnest schoolboys and perspiring aunts pursued the trail. And then mixed hockey arrived—about 1893—and soon became the rage. Hockey had been a very primitive game, played mostly at schools with sticks cut from the tree, and though modern hockey had had its rules and clubs since 1886, the first mixed games were chaotic affairs, in which any serviceable cudgel or even walking-stick was employed, and the ball was borrowed from tennis, or was a special contrivance covered with string. All this was very rapidly changed, and mixed hockey teams, armed with the best implements that money could buy, took the field week after week during the winter, of course within the limits of social equality, or nearly so, for occasionally somebody just beyond the borderland would be admitted, for the sake of his prowess, to the game and the subsequent tea. There were curious niceties of etiquette, for in some circles it was considered not quite good form to wear shorts. The present writer can testify to having been constrained, much against his will, to don riding breeches and gaiters, with a hunting stock, for the honour of playing outside left in a grown-up team.

[1] I think 1892–3.

The craze for this sort of tea-party hockey gradually died away, and the game was raised to such a high standard of technique that it became almost a monopoly of amateur specialists. For the drift was already setting, at the end of the century, towards a deadly seriousness of both sexes in the pursuit of what had once ranked as pleasure. If you presumed to meddle in games, you must be an expert or nothing.

CHAPTER IX

THREE SUPERMEN

After the election of 1895, the mood of triumphant self-satisfaction, which had been growing as the century waned, obtained full sway over the national consciousness. The old Queen, with her physical powers slowly failing but her spirit as indomitable as ever, had the satisfaction of seeing in power just the ministers that she would probably have chosen herself. Her satisfaction was shared by the overwhelming majority of her upper and middle-class subjects, while as for the workers, what they had seen of the last Liberal Government had been calculated to inspire them with little respect and less hope, and they had hardly begun to envisage a ministry drawn from their own class as a serious possibility. For many of them the Empire offered attractions decidedly superior to those of Home Rule and Local Veto, and only comparable, for excitement, with those of professional football.

It was undoubtedly a very strong team that Lord Salisbury had put into the field. He himself, and the Duke of Devonshire, supplied just that element of aristocratic stability calculated to inspire confidence in the mind of the ordinary Englishman. Mr. Balfour, the leader of the Commons, was known to possess one of the subtlest intellects of his time, and had, as Secretary of State for Ireland, proved himself a man of iron courage and will-power. But the man on whom the limelight was focused, and to whose personality these others seemed mere foils, was "Joe"—for the man in the street seldom

referred to Mr. Chamberlain by any other name. That he had ever been the almost Republican of the left wing, who had talked about the possessing classes paying ransom and had bandied threats with Lord Salisbury about breaking heads, was now quite forgotten. To those of us who had just begun to take a boyish interest in politics, Joe figured as

> In fact quite the cream
> Of the Unionist team.

His very face seemed to have changed from that of the dour and whiskered mayor. A more thoroughgoing application of the razor combined with the eye-glass, the orchid, and immaculate tailoring, to produce a new, dapper appearance, as of one whom duchesses delighted to honour. But there was a firmness in the chiselling of his profile that made him the very embodiment of that quality most esteemed in the later nineties—efficiency.

Chamberlain had shown sound judgment in choosing for himself the Colonial Office, not hitherto among the most distinguished of ministerial appointments. But "Colonial" was already an out-of-date title. What Chamberlain designed to be was nothing less than minister for the Empire. His ambitions had for some time been tending in that direction, for he, more than any other statesman of his day, had the vision granted to Mr. Kipling of Little England becoming the centre of a world-embracing dominion. He saw the daughter nations growing to manhood, and he believed it was possible to bind them together in a vast, Pan-Britannic federation. He had now the opportunity to make the dream a reality. Instead of the chilling officialdom that had hitherto characterized the relations of Downing Street with the colonies, he approached them with a new, imaginative sympathy, and a desire to give the utmost possible extension to the imperial idea.

There were critics who did not hesitate to impute to Chamberlain the vilest and most sordid motives, for no statesman, since the time of Walpole, had ever contrived to excite such ferocious hatred in his opponents, and few such enthusiasm in their supporters. But the critics were wrong, for Chamberlain, who had long ago made his fortune, had loftier ambitions than that of feathering his already amply lined nest. He was one of those men who are only happy in creation. He had created a new model of political organization in the Birmingham Caucus; as Mayor he had created a new model of municipal efficiency; as minister he had designed to do for the whole country what he had done for his native town, and to make its social system a model for the world. To this end he was now able to do no more than act as a stimulus to his Tory colleagues, lest they should depart from the standards of social progress already set by Cross and Randolph Churchill, but as his vision became world-wide his interest in social problems grew more perfunctory.

He was, except in the scope of his genius, a typical man of his time. The inflamed nationalism that had captured the civilized world, and was destroying the old Liberalism, had now taken the form of a feverish desire for expansion. Every important nation had become acutely and aggressively race-conscious, had convinced itself of its superiority to all other races, had discovered kinsmen beyond its borders whom it must, by fair means or foul, expand those borders to include. Less sentimental motives entered into consideration, for those even more highly industrialized communities began to feel that their own territory was no longer sufficient for their needs—they must control their markets or go hungry; trade followed the flag. It was obvious to nobody that these overlapping ambitions, pursued *à outrance*, amounted to collective insanity, and could only end

in universal catastrophe. It was the spirit of the time, and everyone wanted to be abreast of the time.

Nobody who has followed Chamberlain's career can doubt the sincerity of his desire to "lay firm and deep", as he expressed it, "the foundations of that imperial union which fills my heart when I look forward to the future of the world". But it was a very different ideal from that of international righteousness which Gladstone—even if he had not always practised it—had never failed to preach. To Chamberlain patriotism, as expanded into imperialism, was enough. Nowhere in his later speeches do we find the least hint of any moral ideal transcending that of the power and greatness of the British Empire. Chamberlain's mind was as clear-cut as his features.

By the time Chamberlain assumed the seals of the Colonial Office, another Pan-Britannic champion had arrived at the zenith of his career. Cecil Rhodes, like so many strong men of that time, was an invalid, and had gone out to South Africa under a death-sentence. Throughout his life he was haunted by a sense of its shortness—"so little done, so much to do" were nearly his last words, with the unspoken corollary, "That thou doest, do quickly." "Amazing" was a word constantly employed in popular journalism at this time, but if ever it had exact appropriateness, it was to the career of Cecil Rhodes. Even as a young man, he had made for himself a colossal fortune out of the diamond mines at Kimberley. These mines had been grabbed for Britain, as long ago as 1871, under Gladstone's auspices, by a piece of imperial sharp practice that no one has ever been hardy enough to defend. The history of Rhodes's career, up to a certain point, differs little enough, in quality, from that of other self-made multi-millionaires in England and America. He was honest enough to avow his belief in money—

"philanthropy plus five per cent" was his way of putting it. And if the claims of God and Mammon are to be reconciled anywhere, it is certainly not in a struggle for survival on a South African diamond field. But if money had been the limit of Rhodes's ambitions, his career would have been even as that of his rival and eventual associate, Barney Barnato, the cheery, vulgar, uneducated East End Jew, who successfully realized his ideal of bliss when he had a pail filled with his own diamonds, from which he could fill his hands, and allow the pretty things to run through his fingers. Poor Barney crowned a career of unbroken success by throwing himself into the sea from a home-bound liner.

But money was never the end of Rhodes's career, as it was of Barnato's. Like Chamberlain, he was a born creator, and he only valued money in so far as it afforded scope for his creative energies. He held the Pan-Britannic ideal in its most extreme form. Lady Lugard says of him that the object to which he proposed to devote his life was nothing less than the governance of the world by the British race.[1] The special province that Rhodes had marked out for his own efforts was the African Continent, and he dreamed of a continuous British territory stretching from the Mediterranean to Table Bay, and bound together by a Cape to Cairo Railway.

By a masterly use of money, and the political influence that his wealth had won for him, he started the Empire on an expansion northwards which brought it, in an incredibly short space of time, right into the centre of the Continent. Rhodes, with his invalid's appreciation of the time factor, fully recognized the need for haste if the vacant territories were to be grabbed in time, and he also knew that empires are no more to be built than fortunes by kid-glove methods. He secured the

[1] *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Cecil Rhodes."

permission of Lord Salisbury's Government, in 1899, to revive the old Elizabethan instrument of a Chartered Company, with himself in control, charged to carry the expansion of the Empire to, and beyond, the Zambezi. This he successfully accomplished, the expansion only ceasing when it impinged on the belt of territory which Germany had contrived to draw across the route of the proposed Cape to Cairo railway. Altogether Rhodes had made the enormous addition of 750,000 square miles to the Empire, though in what sense this territory was "possessed" by England, or how much such possession could profit the possessor, no one at the time paused to inquire. If you coloured territory red, the Queen had it, the Empire had it, you and I had it, and that was all there was to it.

Of course, there were black people who had had it before. There had to be some dirty and bloody work before the promised land of Rhodesia was made safe for civilization, but this white man's burden was very efficiently shouldered by the Company's emissaries and troopers. It was no worse than was going on all over that gigantic Naboth's vineyard that was called Africa, and a great deal better than the unspeakable horrors perpetrated in the Congo district.

In this latest phase of imperialism, the sordid and the sublime were strangely mixed. One likes to think of Rhodes riding out into the lonely Matoppo Hills where he now lies buried, to interview the chiefs of insurgent tribes. His life was at their mercy, and they knew it. And yet when he asked them whether it was to be peace or war, they lay down their sticks in token of surrender. "We shall always call you Lamula'mkunzi"—separator of the fighting bulls—they told him, and he replied that they were his children.[1] And his first care was to

[1] *The Life of Cecil Rhodes*, by Sir Lewis Mitchell, Vol. II, p. 165.

provide them with the food they needed to tide them over to the next harvest, pledging his own money, if the resources of the Company were not forthcoming, for the purpose. Unscrupulous he may have been, but he was cast in the heroic mould.

Though Rhodes's health had been to all appearance restored, he never ceased to act as a sick man in a hurry. He looked to see the triumph of the Pan-Britannic ideal in his time—and that time threatened to be short. It was unfortunate, therefore, that the chief obstacle in his path consisted in the opposition of those Calvinist and unprogressive Dutch farmers whose farms dotted the great grass-lands of the Veldt. The modern age had broken rudely in upon that Old Testament simplicity, with the discovery of a fabulously rich gold-field in the heart of the land that their fathers had trekked into the unknown to possess. A cosmopolitan horde, anything but God-fearing, had been drawn to the lure of cheap riches, and the Boers saw their hardly won independence in danger of being swamped by sheer weight of numbers if they were to concede rights of equal citizenship to these new-comers. The land was theirs, and if strangers liked to come into it to make their fortunes, they deemed it only fair that they should do so on sufferance, and pay the owners for their privilege. To be relieved of his taxes in this way was a solution highly acceptable to the shrewd soul of a farmer. But it was one difficult to reconcile with the British principle, "no taxation without representation". And the new-comers were mostly of British extraction.

In 1890, Rhodes, with Dutch as well as British support, had become Prime Minister, and almost dictator of Cape Colony. It was an essential part of his scheme to unite British and Dutch in South Africa into a federation of communities within the Empire. But now he felt himself brought up short

against the dull inertia of Boer resistance to progress in any shape, and most of all under British auspices. That resistance took visible form in the personality of the Transvaal President, Paul Kruger, the very antithesis of Rhodes in character, but, partly for that very reason, more nearly his match than any other opponent he had encountered. The old burgher, who had taken part in the great Boer exodus from the Cape in the year of the Queen's accession, and had shared in the now almost legendary triumph of Dingaan's Day, had all the typical farmer's shrewdness and a double portion of his pig-headedness. He was also a religious mystic, of a kind that England had not seen since the days of the Ranters and Muggletonians. As a young man, he had wandered forth to commune with God in the wilderness, and ever since then Paul Kruger and his Maker had been on extremely intimate terms. This in no way prevented him from seeking his ends—which were those of his God and people—by crooked courses and with the aid of unscrupulous associates. In private life, he was a homely and unpretentious old fellow of the kind who gets inevitably known as "uncle". It says worlds about him that when they asked his leave to put up a statue to him in Pretoria, he stipulated that a hollow should be scooped in the crown of the top-hat, to catch water for the birds.

Such was the man who stood across the path of Rhodes's schemes for a Pan-Britannic Africa. His own Cape Dutch Rhodes was able to capture with the splendour of his imagination, but the Jehovah-drunken old Dopper beyond the Vaal had no ears for such appeals. As an English farmer might have put *it*, he weren't a-going to be druv. He was determined, in his heart, not to make the least substantial concession to the strangers within his gates; he was equally determined that if they dug on his

land, they should pay for it. He might bargain and haggle till all was blue, but like Queen Victoria, he did not believe in giving up anything he had got.

Had Rhodes possessed patience, he would have seen that the problem would be best left to solve itself. Uncle Paul was already a great-grandfather, and it was his prestige that was maintaining the reactionary party in power. Once he closed his eyes, the more Liberal and progressive influences among his countrymen would be able to assert themselves. But Rhodes could not afford to wait, and, as it turned out, when Kruger's body was brought back to rest in his beloved Transvaal, Lamula'mkunzi had already been sleeping for two years in the solid rock of his Rhodesian hills. The knot that death would be too slow in untying, the sword must cut. Rhodes would deal with Kruger as he had dealt with Lobengula, King of the Matabele, who had incurred the doom of Naboth in Rhodesia. In such a case one could not be nice in choice of means—and Rhodes did not hesitate to use his double rôle as Premier of the Cape and controller of the Chartered Company to concentrate on the Transvaal borders, with the idea of providing a spear-head for an armed revolt in the Rand, or gold-field, the same force of mounted infantry that had shot to pieces Lobengula's impis. Old Kruger waited quietly, as he himself put it, for the tortoise to put out its head. This was done with untortoise-like precipitation, for the commander on the spot, Dr. Jameson, was even more impatient than Rhodes himself, and upset his chief's apple-cart by invading the Transvaal with his few hundred troopers. The whole affair was a ludicrous fiasco. The mining community had no stomach for armed rebellion, and Jameson, after a long ride across the veldt to within a few miles of his destination, was easily rounded up by Boer

commandos, and, without any attempt to die in the last ditch, very sensibly laid down his arms.

The world-wide horror and reprobation aroused by this barefaced invasion of a friendly country in time of peace were none the less genuine, in view of the fact that every country was engaged in exactly the same game of
himself, in his younge
Raid of his own o
Though there was never a shadow of proof, it was almost universally believed that Chamberlain had been secretly backing Rhodes and Jameson. The mere fact that Britain had beaten all her rivals in the race for territory, made these rivals all the more ready to believe the worst of her. British imperialism was everywhere denounced, and Britain was in such a position of isolation as she had occupied at the time of her struggle with her American colonies. Old Kruger, who had magnanimously handed over his captives to the tender mercies of the English law-courts, was only confirmed in his obstinacy, and began feverishly to arm against the struggle that he now foreboded with Chamberlain and the power of Britain. As for Rhodes, his failure had been on the same colossal scale as his successes, and the worst feature of it was that he had forfeited the loyalty of the Cape Dutch, and worked up the whole Dutch community of South Africa into a state of embittered race-consciousness.

We have seen in Chamberlain and Rhodes the supreme representatives of British nationalism, in the Pan-Britannic form that brought it into line with the "Pans" and imperialisms of the Continent. But a third is wanted to complete the picture, for the race-fever that had swept through the world with epidemic virulence, was only kept alive by continual doses of mass-suggestion. The new field of journalistic opportunity had hitherto been exploited mainly for the

purposes of entertainment, though W. T. Stead had shown how the new sensationalism was capable of arming the journalist with formidable powers of swaying public opinion on the most serious issues of domestic and foreign policy. But Stead was essentially an amateur, and had never really regarded the question in the dry light of business. He was too much of an enthusiast for that, too hopelessly the victim of his own suggestions. Fame and fortune still awaited the adventurer into the field of serious journalism who would take a perfectly scientific view of the problem how to work upon the public mind so as to achieve the maximum of sales, and consequently of profits.

Such a man was Alfred Harmsworth—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, such men were Alfred and his brother Harold, a perfect combination of journalistic genius with a business judgment almost infallible. From the very first, their methods were those of thoroughgoing realism. They were out to scrap all the obsolete nonsense about the newspaper proprietor being a responsible public functionary. He was a merchant of whatever wares the public liked or could be made to demand. His success, like that of any other merchant, was measured by what it would fetch. The Harmsworths laid the foundations of their fortunes by rivalling Newnes in his own field. Alfred's tawny *Answers* was soon figuring as conspicuously on book-stalls and in the little shops in poor streets as the green *Tit-Bits*. But the brothers were minded to begin the distinctive part of their adventure where Newnes had left off. In 1894 they acquired the *Evening News*, in 1896 they founded the *Daily Mail*, whose phenomenal success, from the first, signalized the final conquest of journalism by the new methods.

Its founder's avowed object of making it the busy man's newspaper, exactly describes the scope of his

achievement. The man who paid a halfpenny for a hurried glance at the morning's news in a crowded smoking carriage on his way up to the City, or at the latest from Gatwick and the divorce court on his way back, did not want to be called upon to use his mind. As well hire a horse and cart, and run behind! He wanted to have his mind agreeably stimulated, his attention caught without being strained. He wanted to be provided with such impressions as would be *translated swiftly and automatically into* emotional response, without any tedious necessity for deliberation and judgment.

This was exactly what the new journalism, with marvellous efficiency, set out to do. Whether either of the brothers had ever studied a treatise on psychology is at least doubtful, but as practical psychologists they had an intuitive genius that served them better than any professional treatise could have done. The proof of the paper is the circulation, and that proof was overwhelming.

Emotional stimulus being the object in view, it was important to ascertain what emotions could most easily be stimulated. In the late nineties this was not difficult. No passion was so easily aroused as that of aggressive patriotism, particularly when sublimated into imperialism. There was no such way of exciting the team spirit as that of appealing to the pride of empire and consciousness of racial superiority. The most paying of all journalese stunts was a war. That great lord of the Yellow Press, Mr. Randolph Hearst, had already shown his appreciation of this fact, when he had bellowed his country into war with Spain. The enormous increase in *Daily Mail* sales during the first year of the South African War, showed on which side editorial bread was buttered. For though men die and civilization totter, the proof of the paper is the circulation.

CHAPTER X

TA-RA-RA-BOOM-DE-AY!

Those who use that irritating nickname, "The Naughty Nineties", are expressing, at best, part of the truth. The reference is to a small group of advanced writers and artists of whose names—except, for too obvious reasons, that of Oscar Wilde—the average man had scarcely so much as heard. "Naughty" was scarcely the adjective that contemporaries, who happened to be neither plutocrats nor Bohemians, would have dreamed of applying to that time of trailing skirts and packed family pews. But if one were compelled to find a substitute, the best that could be done would be to draw on nautical analogy, and talk of "The Roaring Nineties", which seems more expressive, on the whole, than the "Noisy", the "Hustling", or the "Jingo Nineties". The impression one wishes to convey is of a quickening of the tempo of life, an increase of its volume, as if some powerful wireless were to be tuned in nearer and nearer to reaction till the roaring point is reached.

If one closes one's eyes, and tries to conjure back those vividly remembered years, catchy and idiotic refrains begin to reawaken, one in particular, which everybody was singing and whistling, which the piano organs ground out with endless reiteration, and from which you never seemed able to get away:

Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!
Ta-ra-ra-BOOM-de-ay!

and so *ad infinitum*. It was supposed to be a part of a

song, something about a naughty girl at the seaside, but not one person in a hundred knew or cared what the song was, or attached any meaning whatever to the refrain. It was not the only thing of the kind going about, there was

"Hi tiddly hi ti ti ti ti!"

but this, though popular, never caught on to anything like the same extent.

The refrain was a cry out of the heart of the age, and exactly expressive of its spirit. It meant that the average person of 1892 and the following years was so satisfied with the general well-being and progress of his wonderful age, that he wanted to give vent to his feelings in inarticulate cries, like a child at a treat. An alternative title to "Hi tiddly hi ti" was "I'm all right", and this would also have been the accurate translation, into prosaic English, of "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!" Sensitive decadents did indeed feel the spirit of the time jar horribly on their nerves, in direct proportion to its noisy self-assurance. But the average man had not the least doubt of his own all-rightness, and that of his age and country. It is hard to blame him for expressing his *joie de vivre* in his own simple way. It is to be feared that such strains—if we tried to adapt them to our own age—would sound rather too like the "Oh happy Starkey!" extorted by the Red Indian from the lips of the captive pirate.

During the decade, the pace of life noticeably increased. The bicycle came into general and strenuous use. The towering "ordinaries" had been the monopoly of a few adventurous experts—some time early in the eighties there is a photograph of Alfred Harmsworth, even as a boy in the van of mechanical progress, leaning thoughtfully against a bicycle nearly as tall as himself.[1] But as soon as the obvious idea of the safety bicycle, with equal wheels,

[1] Reproduced in Hamilton Fyfe's *Northcliffe.*

had penetrated the consciousness of manufacturers, it became known that the new means of locomotion was at the command of anybody who had a few pounds to lay out, and a pair of sound legs to pedal with. Improvements followed one another throughout the decade, notably the pneumatic tyre, rim-brakes fore and aft, foot-rests for coasting, the free wheel, the little oil bath of the Sunbeam. Famous models were turned out by competing firms—a Beeston Humber was as much esteemed then as a Rolls-Royce now.

It is difficult for us to realize what a wonderful and joyous acquisition a bike—for so it was almost invariably characterized—was in the first freshness of its discovery. It meant this—that hitherto, unless one had been prepared to order out the horse and trap, if any, and make a serious expedition, one had been tied to walking distance of one's own home. Now, however, one had only to get the bike out of the shed, jump on to the saddle, and be ten miles away in the course of an hour. It meant that one's legs would propel one at three times the speed of old days. This gave a sense of power and freedom that made the mere act of biking a luxury. People biked just for the pleasure of doing so, they circled enthusiastically round the Parks, and even if they had not "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" on their lips, they certainly had it in their hearts.

The coming of the bicycle brought the emancipation of women perceptibly nearer. It became more difficult now than ever to anchor the girl to the home, and the bike was not a vehicle that lent itself to chaperonage. The element of restfulness imparted to life by the stay-at-home woman of Victorian tradition was now, like so many other Victorian traditions, quite out of date. It was a hustling age, and life was speeded up for Jill as well as for Jack.

In 1896 the bicycle was joined by the motor-car, and

the law was at last repealed that made it obligatory for every vehicle propelled by mechanical power to have a man with a red flag trudging in front of it. The thing was at first looked on as a huge joke, and on the day that motoring was legalized a procession of cars gathered on the Embankment with the object of getting to Brighton. Some stayed put at the starting-point, others came to grief on the way, only a gallant remnant struggled through to their destination. A song, in which this adventure was guyed, went somewhat as follows:

> We all agreed this thing cannot be trusted,
> And so said Pa,
> "Quite right!" said Ma,
> When all at once the thing blew up and busted,
> And near and far
> Went bits of Pa!

For in these early days it was quite seriously believed that a motor-car would blow up and bust on any, or no, provocation, and nervous landlords actually refused to harbour such infernal machines on their premises. But soon it was realized that the new horseless carriage had come to stay, and the results of long-distance races organized on the Continent—for the English roads were not available for that purpose—showed that motoring was an essential part of that progress, faith in which was the nearest approach to deep religious conviction that the great majority of the public could make.

For though the forms of orthodoxy were still maintained, religion had come to count for exceedingly little in the life of the nation. In clerical circles there were still the time-honoured intrigue and bickering between High and Low, but what interested the parsons no longer interested the nation as it had done in the days of the Oxford Movement or of the first evolution controversy. Most people who counted for anything intellectually had convinced themselves that

in the conflict between science and religion, science had definitely got the best of it, though it might not always be in the best of taste to advertise the fact. And the attempt of a certain group of advanced High Churchmen to reconcile faith and progress and take an evolutionary view of inspiration was somewhat too obviously dictated by cruel necessity.

It was not that the nineties were specially interested in anti-religious propaganda. They had so many other things to get excited about that they had ceased to care much about ultimate problems. If you asked whether Man was descended from an ape or an angel, the answer was something like "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!" or "I'm all right". It is not when people are in such a mood that they cast up their eyes even to an empty heaven.

The devil was well, the devil a monk was he!

The climax of national self-satisfaction came in 1897, when Queen Victoria celebrated her second, or Diamond Jubilee. The good old lady had at last, like her reign and Empire, broken all records. Even since her last Jubilee, fabulous stretches of territory had been added to that Empire, and the map of the world assumed a positively apoplectic appearance. The new Jubilee took the form of a gigantic advertisement of Britain's imperial power. Slouch-hatted colonials, turbaned sowars, figured conspicuously in the pageant, in which the tired and lonely widow, with her face like parchment, was driven, amidst the blare of bands and the cheering of vast multitudes, to the steps of St. Paul's—for she was now too feeble to undergo the ordeal of another service in the Abbey. A spectacular naval review was staged at Spithead, to make it quite clear to a jealous world that Britannia continued to rule the waves. And there were bonfires and junketings galore in every town and village in the kingdom.

In the midst of all these rejoicings, there came a

strange and solemn warning, from the quarter it was least expected. Mr. Kipling was now the accredited laureate of Empire—the official holder of the title constituting a rather bitter joke of that old cynic, Lord Salisbury, at the expense of the Muses. Of course Mr. Kipling was expected to make his contribution to the general pæan. In one line of his poem, and one alone, he came up to expectations, concentrating in it all that was most outrageous in the arrogance of the hour:

Lesser breeds without the Law

in other words—foreigners. But for the rest of his poem, Mr. Kipling was inspired by spirit of a Hebrew prophet, recalling his countrymen from their trust in "reeking tube and iron shard", from "frantic boast and foolish word", to the fear of a God whom, in their heathenish pride, they had almost forgotten. The poem was universally applauded, but no one particularly cared about its meaning, or felt the remotest shiver of apprehension at the words

"One with Nineveh and Tyre."

But the influence of Mr. Kipling was helping to inspire strains of a very different order. The "frantic boast and foolish word" swelled in louder and louder chorus. The brief and brilliant hey-day of the music-hall had begun, and the old tavern singing clubs had given place to highly capitalized palaces of entertainment, sometimes with a promenade attached for the convenience of whores and their clients. Enormously-paid entertainers, some of them of real genius, functioned at these shows. And amid much that was merely aimless and frivolous, it became an obviously paying proposition to exploit to the full the hectic nationalism that had a peculiar appeal for young men in an after-dinner mood.

It would be an interesting task to collect all those

forgotten choruses by which the Sons of the Blood contrived to vaunt their fathomless power and flaunt their iron pride. They would make excellent reading on any day of national humiliation. Some of them were just maudlin, like

Off with your hat when the flag goes by
 And let the heart have its say!
You're man enough for a tear in your eye,
 That you will not wipe away,

some historical:

In Kent when Romans came to seize old John Bull's British soil,
We didn't let great Cæsar have the best of all the spoil:
We've thrashed the Danes and Saxons too, and history can brag . . .

Evidently, and sometimes the whole world is challenged to come and take us on, on the ground that:

A little British army goes a long, long way,

or the note becomes bluff and manly, as in:

Oh Tommy, Tommy Atkins, you're a good 'un heart and hand,
You're a credit to your calling and to all your native land . . .
God bless you, Tommy Atkins!

one of several specimens of the then fashionable "Tommy" craze. A slight variation is the cult of the wooden-legged pensioner, who longs:

to face the foe once again before I go,
And to fight beneath the dear old flag.

But the culmination of it all was in *Soldiers of the Queen*, whose immense popularity, just before the South African War, may be judged by the fact that the tune is still a favourite at military tattoos. The words must be read in full to be believed and consist of a full-mouthed, incoherent roar to the effect that

Nations that we've shaken by the hand
Our bold resources try to test,

but that we are roused, have buckled on our swords, have said good-bye to diplomacy, and that though the singers themselves are happily not compelled "to military duties do", the hired soldiers of the Queen, who have never yet been beaten, will take on all comers and—as the Philistines of old days had put it—show them a thing.

The Press, particularly that of the new, popular school, reeked with blood and reverberated with thunder. Every sort of violent adventure was provided for the delectation of readers, and future wars, with awful slaughter and appalling carnage on every page, were lusciously detailed. One of the most popular of the new weeklies actually went so far as to publish a serial in which England is supposed to be at war with France, Germany and Russia, and easily licks the lot, taking Paris by storm, smashing to pieces the German army, and conducting a successful invasion of Russia, among the conquering geniuses being Sir Redvers Buller.

In the early spring of 1898, an aged and dying man stepped into the train at Bournemouth on his last journey home. Turning to those who stood on the platform to bid him farewell, he said, "with quiet gravity"[1]:

"God bless you, and this place, and the land you love."

It was the last public utterance of Mr. Gladstone.

[1] Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, Vol. III, p. 526.

CHAPTER XI

THE DEFLATION OF OPTIMISM

In two years following the Diamond Jubilee it must have been apparent that the pace of imperial progress was too killing to last. Social reform had now receded into the background. Mr. Keir Hardie and his cloth cap were no longer seen at Westminster; Chamberlain's scheme of Old Age Pensions was postponed till the Greek Calends. The country had more exciting things to think about. There was a war on, of the sort calculated to rejoice the heart of every true imperialist. Britain was advancing up the Nile to avenge Gordon. The Sirdar, Sir Herbert Kitchener, was written up as one of those cold, silent supermen, who only lacked a Watson on his staff to make him a perfect magazine hero. Drawing the railway after him as a spider draws her thread, he arrived outside Khartoum in the late summer of 1898. Then there was a glorious and spectacular massacre. The Khalifa's whole army came out with their primitive weapons, and most obligingly proceeded to rush across the desert in one great yelling horde, for all the world like the animals driven on to the guns in one of the big Continental batteries. Every bursting shrapnel tore a black hole in the crowd, and the Lee Metfords, firing ten shots to the minute, mowed them down as fast as they could get into the field of fire. The bag, in killed alone, topped the ten thousand mark, and the Anglo-Egyptian-Sudanese losses were trifling. That was the end of the Khalifa's power, and he himself was rounded up and killed some months later. Some mean-spirited fellows—so

it was generally agreed—tried to make political capital out of the Sirdar's prompt action in destroying the Mahdi's tomb and throwing his remains to the crocodiles, but that only enhanced the public appreciation of the strong man acting strongly.

For the moment it looked as if this war were destined to be the prelude to one even more exciting, for it turned out that a French major with a few followers, mostly natives, had arrived on the Nile at a point above Khartoum. This, under the rules of African grab, was to establish a claim to part of the continent that England had already claimed as her own, and the Khedive's, special preserve. John Bull was in no mood to stand nonsense from foreigners. *Punch* depicted him dealing with a scoundrelly-looking French organ-grinder:

"What you give me if I go away?"

"I'll give you something if you don't."

Less insults have precipitated war. Luckily there were cool heads at the Quai d'Orsay, and Lord Salisbury could be the most conciliatory of Foreign Ministers. The thing was settled somehow, and France, desperately wounded in her pride and seething with hatred of England, withdrew her expedition. Imperialism had scored another sensational triumph, and the mind of the nation might have been fairly described, in Mr. Kipling's words, as "drunk with sight of power", and consequently devoid of all sense of reality.

The next move in the game was obvious. Gordon had been avenged; not so Majuba and the added humiliation of Jameson's fiasco. It was time to deal with Kruger, and get that question of the Rand franchise settled once and for all. A strong man, Alfred Milner, of the type so popular in the nineties, was sent out as High Commissioner to deal with the situation on the spot. After nearly two years spent in studying it, he came to the conclusion that the

strong line was the only one to take. On the last day of May, 1899, Milner and Kruger met in conference at Bloemfontein. The President had come prepared to drive a hard bargain. The younger man was determined not to be drawn into a haggle. He knew exactly what he had come to demand; he was determined to accept nothing less; and he kept on pinning his opponent remorselessly down to the point. That is not the way to do successful business with a farmer, and the more he was pressed, the more obstinately determined was the old Dopper not to be cornered. "If you won't do any bargaining," he complained, "it will not be my fault if we don't come to terms." And so the Conference broke up without result.

After this, it was fairly obvious that the only way for the two strong men, Chamberlain and Milner, to carry their point, was by force of arms. They continued to press their demands with more and more menacing insistence, while Kruger temporized and offered carefully qualified concessions, and the commandos began to muster on the frontier. It is proof of the strange atmosphere of unreality that invested the whole proceedings, that that frontier had been left practically defenceless, and if the Boers had been a little quicker in their preparations, they could have swept over the whole of British South Africa. As it was, the British were able to rush out a division from India just in time to save Natal and act as a magnet to the Boer forces. The end came when the British Government had announced its intention of formulating its own proposals, and began mobilizing an army to back them. The Boers—the Free State having now thrown in its lot with the Transvaal—were not minded to wait for its arrival, and so declared war in the form of an ultimatum.

Few people in England doubted that the army corps that was being dispatched to South Africa,

under the command of Sir Redvers Buller, would easily be able to dispose of Kruger's undisciplined burghers. Rhodes himself was known to be contemptuous of the Boers' fighting qualities. There were even newspaper experts who believed in the ability of Sir George White's little army already on the spot to win the war off its own bat. The country was not unpleasantly thrilled; the music-halls rose to the occasion, and exploited the prevailing mood of patriotism for all it was worth. Their patrons at least had no doubt as to what would happen,

> For when they see the British soldier come,
> For old Oom Paul things will fairly hum!
> We've three good men in Buller, Powell and White;
> There'll be a hot time in the Transvaal to-night!

And when the news came through of the first battles, kopjes stormed, Majuba avenged, a British general falling mortally wounded in the hour of victory, delight was unbounded. This war was going to be even better than the last.

And then other news began to come in. It appeared that White had been soundly beaten, that a couple of regiments had been cut off and had surrendered after sustaining strangely few casualties, that the rest of the Natal army was shut up in the little town of Ladysmith. But this was nothing to what was to come. It was annoying that the programme should be upset in this way, but it would make the victory of that great captain, Sir Redvers Buller, all the more glorious by contrast. The army corps started brilliantly with no less than three victories, each more expensive than the last, gained by one of its divisions dispatched to raise the Boer siege of Kimberley and Cecil Rhodes.

And then, in one week in December, came a cumulative series of blows that did at last arouse the country from its dreams of optimism, and plunge it

into such gloom and consternation as had not been within living memory. The army corps was beaten, not at one point only, but at all. Gatacre in the centre, Methuen on the road to Kimberley, finally Buller himself with the main force in Natal—and he had lost a couple of batteries. It appeared that Buller had not even tried to manœuvre; he had just ordered his men to proceed in the direction of the Boer trenches, and when a thousand or so had been shot down, had ordered them to leave off. Any schoolboy with a map could have thought of something more clever. What nobody knew at the time was that Buller had followed up this performance by one more amazing still. He had heliographed to White a suggestion that he should surrender Ladysmith. White was not a great commander, but he was not the man to throw up the sponge in a fit of the dumps.

What had happened was simply that the power of the modern rifle had asserted itself in a way that had been predicted by a Polish civilian, Ivan Bloch, two years before, but which, up to the time of the Great War, the soldiers had steadily refused to take into their calculations. So long as England commanded the seas and Continental Powers did not intervene, it was only a question of bringing the overwhelming resources of the Empire into play to achieve some sort of ultimate victory. But the country had gone into a mood of tragic heroism, and the necessary business was accomplished in a state of emotional tension bordering on hysteria. The popular hero, Lord Roberts of Candahar, was sent out to take supreme command, with Kitchener, the strong man of the Sudan, as Chief of the Staff, and the egregious Buller was allowed, or rather had to be goaded on, to continue his blundering and half-hearted attempts to relieve Ladysmith. All available troops were sent out, volunteers were called for, and welcome proof

was given of the loyalty of the colonies to the imperial connection.

The immediate crisis soon passed. Lord Roberts, with his now overwhelming forces, surrounded and captured the Boer army that had been besieging Kimberley, and brushed aside the feeble forces that barred his advance to the Free State capital, Bloemfontein. Even Buller at long last managed to butt his way into Ladysmith. There now only remained one more garrison to be relieved. This was at Mafeking, an isolated post of no military, but of great spectacular, value. For here was war of the best magazine type, a light-hearted and not too tragic adventure, and a hero, Colonel Baden-Powell, endowed with an impish and histrionic genius. The most amusing things were told about the siege—of entertainments got up by the commander to keep up the spirits of the garrison, of a lady of title engaged in the womanly occupation of sniping at burghers, and finally of how the Boers had made a last desperate attempt to break through the defences, and how the wily Colonel had persuaded the victorious storming party, in a way that brooked no denial, to remain permanently inside as his guests.

When, shortly after this episode, Mafeking was relieved, the main army, after a long delay and one or two ugly reverses to its detached forces, was sweeping on, practically unopposed, to Pretoria. The war was going to turn out a good one after all, and was ending happily, on the best melodramatic lines, after just the right amount of thrills and anxieties. Accordingly the news that a relieving column had arrived at Mafeking had the effect of sending the country off its head with joy. It was the spirit of the now almost forgotten Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay resurrected in a wild, hysterical orgy of Sons of the Blood fraternizing and flag-waving and dancing in the streets for the edification of Lesser Breeds.

The triumphant mood lasted long enough for Lord Salisbury's Government to go to the country with the slogan that every vote given to a Liberal was a vote given to the Boers, and to come back with another thumping majority. All the towns and railway lines were in the hands of the British; Kruger was an exile in Holland; and towards the end of the year Lord Roberts came home to receive a conqueror's ovation, leaving Kitchener to mop up the scattered commandos who still persisted in the criminal folly of not knowing when they were beaten. The business of mopping up had already been prolonged in the most annoying way. The Boer armies had broken up into mobile commandos, which were about as easy to find, on the vast expanse of the veldt, as the proverbial needle in a bottle of hay, and were not only able to strike, with telling effect, at the far-flung line of British communications, but actually to carry the war into British territory and kindle the fires of rebellion far and wide over the Cape Province. From a bewildered headquarters wild proclamations were issued on the Prussian model of 1870—farms to be burnt within a ten miles' radius of a cut railway, and so forth—which, though no serious attempt was made to act upon them, afforded excellent material for anti-British propaganda—and most of all in Germany. They might have been waste paper so far as the Boers were concerned.

What no one dreamed was that the business of conquering the Boers was not yet half-way through; that the climax of victory was but the prelude to an enormously prolonged anti-climax, in which all the spectacular honours would rest with the enemy, and the Boers would be displayed, in the eyes of a by no means unprejudiced world, as a band of heroic patriots defending their freedom, in the spirit of Hofer and William the Silent, against the overweening might of a world-empire. A more effective damper

could not have been imagined to the mood of roystering optimism that had prevailed in the nineties. A chill wind of doubt had begun to stir in the dawn of the new century. Of what graver trouble might this one of South Africa be the harbinger?—what wars? what social convulsions? what lean and bitter years? Could it be that the clouds of darkness that had troubled that forgotten crank in the *Prophetic Times* were at last beginning to darken the sky, and that there might come an end even to Progress?

This only Time could show, but to one personage in the drama he had already shown more than enough. The old Queen had been getting more and more feeble in body, and her spirit had been cruelly torn by the sufferings of her beloved soldiers. But that spirit was as indomitable as ever, and it was the Victoria who had defied Peel and stood up to Palmerston, who curtly and indignantly took to task her civilian War Minister for interfering with generals in the field. "I am at a loss to understand what has led you to send such a message to Lord Roberts. He surely is the only judge of what is necessary, and must not be interfered with by civilians at a distance who cannot judge the exact state of the case. . . . I must ask that such messages should not be sent without my previous knowledge."[1] And Lady Gwendolen Cecil informs us how Her Majesty, at the darkest hour of the war, could reply to one of her ministers, in the true Elizabethan vein: "There is no one depressed in *this* house; we are not interested in the possibilities of defeat; they do not exist".

In the first month of the Twentieth Century, Lord Roberts, back from the front, was bidden to an interview with his Sovereign at Osborne. The two old people must have had deep feelings in common, for Lord Roberts was mourning the loss of an only

[1] *Lord Lansdowne: A Biography*, by Lord Newton, p. [illegible].

son, shot down while earning the Victoria Cross in a forlorn hope to bring off Buller's lost guns at Colenso, and as for the Queen, the void left in her heart by her husband's death had never been filled. Her thoughts flowed naturally back to the old days—she was able to tell her visitor of what another of her captains, even more famous, had told her of his difficulties in the Peninsula. And then, when he had gone, she collapsed.

A few days later, messengers on bicycles were dashing through the streets of the neighbouring Cowes, raucously shouting to those who lined the pavements—"Queen's dead!"

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